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Tradition and Modernity in Bath Between the Wars

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Tradition and Modernity in Bath Between the Wars

Robin Pakes

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering
Faculty of Engineering and Design

September 2015

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Abstract

As Britain sought to reconstruct itself after the experience of Victorian urban degradation and the Great War, Bath's Roman heritage and Georgian architecture positioned the city as a symbol of national identity that readily exhibited continuity with a redefined historic past. Yet despite its historic image, primary source material and contemporary local press reports in particular indicate that interwar Bath demonstrated a civic dynamism and impetus towards urban and social improvement. These factors were expressed through a range of developments the significance of which and the experience of change they represented for those who visited or lived in Bath between the wars, has been largely overlooked in the city's twentieth century urban and social historiography.

This study will investigate how the articulation and expression of historical importance intersected with urban development and technological and social change in the City of Bath during the interwar period. Whilst local legislation sought to prevent undesirable development and promote a stylistic adherence to local architectural traditions, economic imperatives and technological and social change required the city to accommodate and adapt to new forms of transport, consumption, entertainment and social organisation. This resulted in a range of planning proposals and developments and new buildings that combined architectural tradition with new construction methods and modern functions. Beyond Bath's historic centre, suburbanisation and the construction of social housing saw new building types and a salient articulation and redistribution of social class within the built environment.

Introduction

Themes, Areas of Research, Sources and Literature.

We of the industrial North, who have worked amid the grime and dirt are glad to live in a city of such beauty and cleanliness as Bath. We love your fine streets, your magnificent buildings, your picturesque crescents. We love almost every stone that we can see.

Mr J.H. Walker, Managing Editor of *The Bath Chronicle*, February 1933.¹

This study will examine how the articulation and expression of historical importance intersected with urban development and technological and social change in the City of Bath between the First and Second World Wars. This relatively unexplored period of the city's history is significant in that after what has been described as decades of 'provincial lethargy',² Bath and its Georgian architecture and Roman heritage became the subject of new and increased local and national interest. Although precipitated by events in the decade before the Great War, such interest also reflected an alignment with the requirements of national reconstruction in that which followed. This positioned the city as an architectural and urban exemplar upon which new understandings of British modernity were formed and from which new expressions of civic and national identity emerged.

The themes of tradition and modernity have been incorporated into this study to elucidate the how the agents and products of change were perceived and modified by a developing and selective understanding of Bath's history. They are significant in that their experience is subject to geographical and historical variation, thus emphasising the importance of contextual understanding.³ Consequently this study focusses on an individual historical situation, albeit one shaped by wider factors. This approach is also informed by the recognition that Bath's unique character 'defies neat categorization'.⁴

The heightened interest in Bath's history in the first decades of the twentieth

century gave rise to new interpretations of its architectural traditions. Given the wider backdrop of change against which this occurred, these might be understood in terms of what Eric Hobsbawm describes as 'responses to novel situations that take the form of reference to old situations' that occur in specific contexts and imply 'a continuity with the past'.⁵ This is readily evident in the stylistic adherence of Bath's interwar architecture to the example set by its Georgian progenitors as a requirement of the principle of local aesthetic control under the 1925 Bath Act that sought to manage the city's developmental trajectory against a wider backdrop of change.

Historical continuity is also seen in the use of the local stone that links Bath to its landscape setting. Whilst it is readily identifiable with the city's aesthetic values, it might be seen as separate from the responsive notions of tradition and continuity that informed Bath's interwar cultural positioning in the light of national reconstruction. Yet its use in the city's interwar municipal housing rather than the cheaper brick called for by the government, can be viewed as a response to the threats of social and urban fragmentation resulting from redistribution of the city's population through the construction of suburban council estates.

The intersection between change and understandings of tradition is further illustrated by an explanation of how modernity might be understood in the context of this study. In the first instance it can be viewed in terms of what Peter Wagner describes as a 'trajectory of intellectual, technological and social progress and globalisation'.⁶ In a contemporary ideological understanding,⁷ this was believed to have stemmed from Britain's eighteenth century political and economic systems and the broader historical precedent of enlightenment natural philosophy.⁸ Bath's Georgian architecture and planning readily demonstrated these nationalist features, whilst the rationalism it displayed meant that it could be interpreted as having developed from the same intellectual precedents as the interwar period's emblematic technologies.⁹

If modernity is understood as progress, it follows that its experience is shaped by what Susan Friedmann describes as the 'condition or sensibility' of change that is felt most profoundly when it is perceived to be accelerating or disruptive.¹⁰ In this

view, change can involve both the rejection of the recent past and the self conscious expression of the new. Yet integral to this is a paradox whereby the distant past and its perceived traditions can provide inspiration for change,¹¹ as illustrated by the 'wise example' set by Bath for ameliorative urban redevelopment in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹²

Such inspiration might appear to contribute to the sense of historical continuity that forms a hallmark of British interwar modernity. Yet it does not adequately explain the selective processes by which inspiration is sought and through which an increased interest and understanding develops. Tom Crook sees this as the product of active and multiple open ended dialogues between the past, present and future.¹³ These can promote an awareness of undesirable change and shape the articulation of historical importance when tradition appears under threat. It is significant in that it informs the formation and ongoing development of conservation bodies. This is illustrated by the foundation of the Old Bath Preservation Society in 1909 and its subsequent revival in 1929 that led to the formation of the Bath Preservation Trust in 1934 as a limited company empowered to collect funds, purchase property and assist and advise in the management of the city's architectural heritage.¹⁴

Chapter one will explore how the understanding and expression of Bath's historical and architectural significance developed in response to the local and national experience of Victorian urbanism, the rise of German industrial militarism and the Great War. It will then examine Bath's relationship to contemporary understandings of British modernity, how notions of its traditions were expressed through local legislative controls and how these came to be viewed as anachronistic in relation to the emergence of the modern movement and the expression of social and technological progress.

Chapter two will investigate the reception and impact of accelerating technological change in relation to the anticipation and experience of aviation and the motor car. It will first explore how Bath responded to the threat of future aerial bombardment and expressed the technological optimism and anxieties associated with civil aviation. It will then examine the impact of the motor car on the city in

terms of the physical and perceptual changes it produced in urban fabric and spaces and how the social and cultural changes it promoted were perceived to conflict with the values interpreted in its historic built environment.

The motor vehicle and the urban problems and economic opportunities it represented are a feature of chapter three's investigation into a series of unrealised large scale city improvement schemes proposed in 1916, 1925 and 1935. It will examine the factors that underpinned their development and the means by which they sought to boost the local economy, beautify the city and rationalise traffic. It will also investigate the nature of support and opposition for the schemes and how they brought the council into conflict with business and the preservation movement whilst exposing class interests and divides in the city.

Chapter four will examine how Bath's architectural traditions and the principle of aesthetic control was expressed in modern buildings that incorporated new technologies and design features and reflected new forms of consumption and entertainment. It will also explore how the rate and nature of the social change for which these buildings acted as a locus was restrained by cultural factors and local legislation that represented a parallel to that intended to control their aesthetic impact on the city's built environment.

National and local political policy forms the basis of chapter five's investigation into the development of the city's interwar council housing. It will first examine how its development was shaped by the requirements and constraints of national reconstruction. Following this it will explore the means and extent to which it represented social progress and how the city council sought to mitigate the divisive characteristics inherent of its new distribution and articulation of social class within the built environment.

Primary research has drawn upon sources that include contemporary illustrations, photographs, architectural drawings, books and journal articles. In addition there has been a major focus upon the reports, articles, letters and illustrations contained in the city's local newspaper, *The Bath Chronicle* that has been published under various titles since the mid-eighteenth century. This is significant for three

reasons. Firstly it reported record sales throughout the interwar period indicating its perceived importance as an alternative to the national press. Secondly in view of contemporary limitations in media choice, it formed the primary means through which news of proposed and actual urban change in the city was disseminated to form shared experience. Finally, given the increased interest in the city's architecture and heritage, it represented the primary means through which understandings of civic patriotism and identity were promoted. The rich and engaging insight into contemporary civic life that it provides has been accessed through the editions held at the Bath Central Library and the press cuttings collections held by the Bath Preservation Trust and the Bath Record Office. In the latter stages of research this was added to significantly by the searchable editions available online at the *British Newspaper Archive*.

Secondary sources can be divided into two categories. The first concerns historical interpretations of modernity and the impact of urban technologies and socioeconomic and cultural factors on the built environment. A notable text in this category is provided by Martin Daunton and Bernard Reiger's *Meanings of Modernity, Britain from the Late Victorian Era to World War II*.¹⁵ This analyses the wider experience of British interwar modernity, emphasises its difference to contemporary developments in Europe and stresses the importance of contextual interpretation.

The second concerns Bath's individual history. At the time of writing there is no published account that focusses solely on the city's interwar development. Research into this period of its history has formed part of wider periodisations. This is illustrated by Robin Lambert's paper, *The Bath Corporation Act of 1925* that is drawn from her doctoral thesis, *Bath et son patrimoine architectural: étude de sa protection au vingtième siècle* and elucidates the relationship between the city's municipal politics and preservation movement during the interwar period.¹⁶

Another significant text is Peter Borsay's *The Image of Georgian Bath 1700 – 2000*.¹⁷ This presents a social history of how the understanding of historic significance has informed civic identity throughout its stated period. In addition it highlights the realities of class distinction in the city that are expanded upon by

Graham Davis' and Penny Bonsall's *A History of Bath, Image and Reality*.¹⁸

Also notable is *The City of Bath* by Barry Cunliffe. It is interesting not for its investigation of interwar Bath, about which it affords only one paragraph, but for its dismissal of the city during the period as a 'grime encrusted ... place of little charm'.¹⁹ This quote is used by Davis and Bonsall to describe the city in the interwar section within their chapter on Bath's twentieth century social and industrial history.²⁰ Given the dichotomy that they seek to promote, and that it is arguably indicative of the contemporary conditions faced by many of Bath's working class residents about which Cunliffe says nothing, its use is understandable.

Yet to describe interwar Bath as such might be said to represent an application of present standards to past conditions that provides little insight into contemporary experience. Although old photographs evidence the affinity of fossil fuel deposits for its local stone, the quote does not correlate with the sentiments expressed in primary sources. Indeed, as a member of Bath's Lancashire and Yorkshire Society pointed out in 1933, the city even with its slums and industry, was a world apart from the urban conditions seen elsewhere.²¹ Consequently, this negative description promotes a view of interwar Bath that overlooks the relationship between contemporary understandings of civic dynamism and historic significance that the chapters in this study seek to investigate.

The areas of investigation in this study are by no means an exhaustive account of interwar Bath's development, although those aspects which do not feature were often subject to the same fate. The upheavals of the Second World War and subsequent socio-political and technological change meant that many of interwar Bath's developmental aspirations would remain unrealised. Furthermore, in a parallel to Neil Jackson's observation that 'In Bath, it is as if the Modern Movement never happened at all or, if it did, it got lost in a storm of light yellow sandstone',²² Bath's interwar buildings have been seemingly absorbed into the wider built environment. Material continuity, stylistic deference and the failure to recognise significance mean that the insights they provide into the experience of this era and its contribution to the city's twentieth century development are easily passed by.

Chapter One

Historical Context, Inspiration and Significance.

As the children of the ancient Mother City of Rome and as civic descendants of the eternal city of Romulus and Remus we were proud to strengthen that bond of friendship between, yea moreover strengthen those ancient family ties betwixt the capital of Italy and Aque Sulis of Britain.

Percy Jackman, Alderman of Bath, 1931.¹

The interwar period saw an increasing interest in Bath's Georgian architecture and Roman heritage. A perception of continuity between these two periods of the city's history formed an inspiration within new interpretations of local, national and imperial identity. This underpinned its representation as a culturally meaningful tourist destination, a visit to which denoted identification and community with the cultural figures who had visited or dwelt there.² The increased interest and understanding of the city's Georgian architecture was also reflected in local legislation that was passed in 1925 to preserve and promote Bath's unique historic character. This prompted a reinterpretation of the city's primary architectural language to incorporate modern development that would defer to and exhibit harmonious continuity with its most identifiable traditions. Yet as the interwar period progressed, the ideas it articulated stood in increasing contrast to the wider expression of architectural and social progress.

These developments stemmed from three local events in the decade before the Great War. The first was the publication of *The Eighteenth Century Architecture of Bath* in 1905. Researched and written by Bath architect and historian Mowbray Aston Green, it was seen as significant in that it formed the first comprehensive and scholarly study of this aspect of the city's development.³ In doing so it placed Bath's Georgian architecture within a dialogic process whereby the selective understanding of an artefact produces an interpretation and articulation of significance over other facets of history, prompts further study and justifies preservation to inform future culture.⁴

The second was the city's Historical Pageant in which the dedication of a wooden replica of the Temple of Sulis Minerva formed the first episode in a re-enactment of the city's history.⁵ This promoted the idea of a Roman basis to British civilisation and displaced the Saxon, Norman and medieval histories that had formed the primary foci of Bath's Victorian antiquarianism and historiography.⁶ The city's Roman heritage would be placed in an imperial context when a Bath stone replica of the Temple was presented as an exhibit at the Festival of Empire Exhibition held at the Crystal Palace in 1911. Popular among visitors it was 'considered by many to be the finest exhibit in the grounds' and won the event's 'Diploma D'Honneur',⁷ indicating the emerging appeal of the historic and imperial values expressed by the Temple replica and interpreted in the City of Bath [figures 1 and 2].



Figure 1: The dedication of the Temple of Sulis at the Bath Historical Pageant. Postcard, 1909 (author's collection).

The third was the formation of the Old Bath Preservation Society in 1910. This was prompted by the locally and nationally controversial proposal to demolish and replace Thomas Baldwin's colonnade on the north side of Bath Street that was built in the 1790s with extension of the mid-Victorian, Grand Pump Room Hotel.⁸ The articulation of significance promoted by the publication of Green's book is evident the Society's aim to:

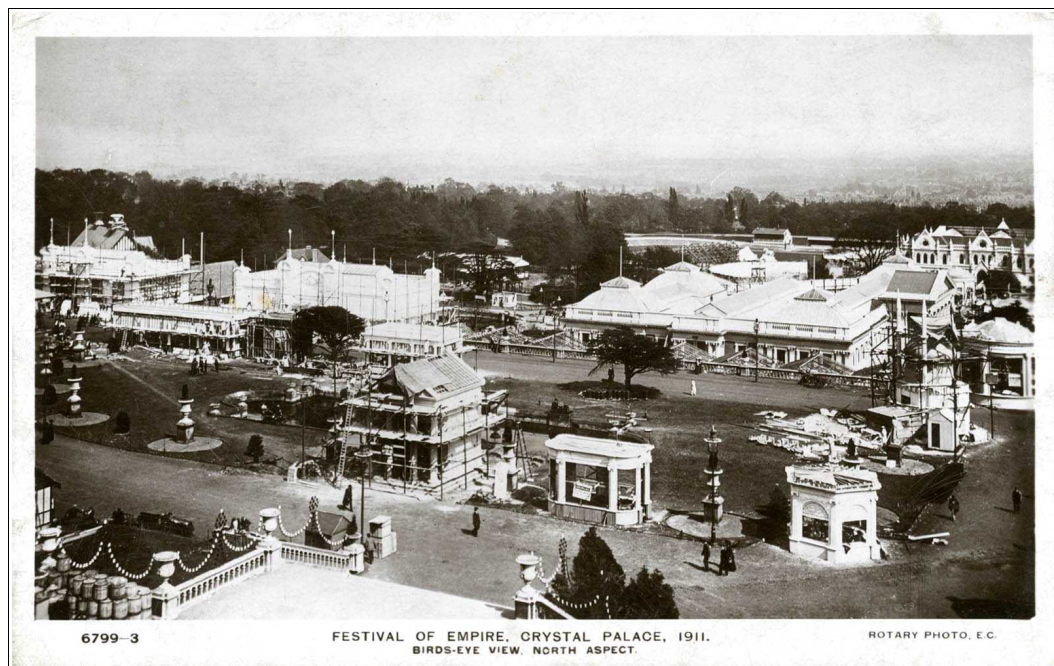


Figure 2: The Temple of Sulis under construction at the Festival of Empire site. Postcard, 1911(author's collection).

*not merely oppose in every legitimate way the mutilation, and in an artistic and architectural sense, the destruction of Bath Street, but also to protect valuable relics of the past still remaining.*⁹

This event can be seen in opposition to the continuation of Bath's nineteenth century stylistic diversification and the economic principles it represented. With the appearance of Gothic Revival, Romanesque and Eclectic architecture in the city, classicism was displaced from its position of stylistic dominance and subsequently forced to compete in what Peter Borsay describes as an 'architectural free market'.¹⁰ Such developments were seen as a reflection of the financial imperatives underpinning municipal policy. In view of the controversy surrounding the proposed Grand Pump Room Hotel extension, *The British Architect* looked back to the lesson in incongruity provided by the Empire Hotel constructed in 1901 and noted:

We are well aware that it is considered well to run towns on good commercial lines and to keep an eye on productive sources of revenue. We venture to think that the sources of value are not to be exactly measured by hotel speculation and

*no city ever did so much to delimit its special architectural value as did Bath when its last gorgeous new hotel was created.*¹¹

The accounts of the controversy that featured in the architectural press indicate a growth in the perceived significance of Bath's eighteenth century architecture and the reaction to Britain's wider urban condition. The Grand Pump Room Hotel had been constructed in the French Renaissance Style in 1870 and is described by Neil Jackson as 'the most supreme expression of mid-Victorian self confidence that Bath ever saw'.¹² Yet it reflected the stylistic fragmentation and commercial determination of British cityscapes seen as synonymous with the problematic urbanism of the recent past [figure 3].

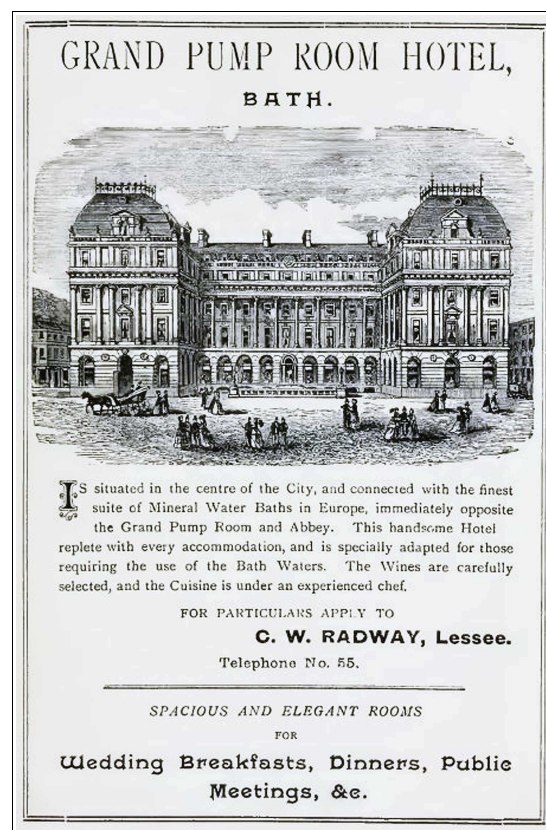


Figure 3: The “Grand Pump Room Hotel”. Advertisement featured in R.E.M. Peach, The Street Lore of Bath, 1893.

By the time the hotel's extension was proposed, the architecture of what was described as 'the sterile desert of the nineteenth century' was increasingly inconsistent with emerging thought on civic architecture.¹³ In its place *The British*

Architect advocated the 'fragrant and well ordered retreat' of the eighteenth century as a source of inspiration to rectify Victorian Britain's erroneous urban trajectory.¹⁴ In view of the proposals in Bath, it was noted that when architects were:

*tentatively advocating the necessity of a return to our traditional Palladian architecture to improve our streets, it is a curiously inopportune moment to inaugurate schemes tending to the destruction of monuments of this style.*¹⁵

To understand how the perceived continuity between Bath's Roman heritage, Georgian Architecture and contemporary interwar Britain emerged, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the rejection of Victorian urbanism and the imperatives of national reconstruction after the Great War. Bath's stylistic diversification during the nineteenth century can be seen as a reflection of shifting interpretations of national identity to incorporate political and economic freedoms that were perceived to be rooted in Anglo-Saxon Britain. In this view it was claimed that the Normans had replaced democratic Saxon institutions with feudalism. This had led to the continued oppression of the middle and lower classes by the aristocracy which in turn enabled the justification of Victorian political reforms as a 'restitution of ancient rights'.¹⁶

Victorian national and political identity was expressed primarily through the Gothic Revival, as indicated by Charles Barry's Houses of Parliament.¹⁷ Yet by the end of the nineteenth century the style had become symbolic of the excesses of urban industrial capitalism and a 'window dressing for a repellent reality' of slums and urban degeneration.¹⁸ This alone might have been sufficient to engender the desire for an ordered reworking of civic built environments. However notions of a national identity based on 'political and religious freedoms' believed to have originated from Germany were invalidated by its unification in 1871, its subsequent industrial and military expansionism and the Great War.¹⁹

This necessitated an alternative form of national architectural expression. Richard Hingley suggests that whilst comparison to Rome had always been integral to the discourse on British political and imperial identity, Britain rejected Roman

despotism and viewed itself as 'politically superior'.²⁰ However in view of the imperatives of national reconstruction and the 'philosophical consideration of concepts such as empire, efficiency and administration',²¹ an alignment with revised concepts of Imperial Rome was required to consolidate notions of nationhood.²²

A central feature of national reconstruction was the requirement for a national architecture that expressed and promoted two sets of ideas. The first was that Britain's imperial status was unchallenged and even strengthened. The second was the understanding of values of consensus, harmony and order as a counter to social and industrial unrest resulting from material shortages, poor housing and economic inequalities. Both sets of ideas could be perceived in Bath's 'wise example',²³ so making the city a historic reference point in the expression of Britain's ongoing civilising imperial mission and what Simon Thurley describes as a 'restrained and well mannered' urban aesthetic.²⁴

This was seen as socially, culturally and technologically distinct from the coal fired industrial urbanism of Victorian Britain. Writing in 1933, the architect and historian Stanley C. Ramsey observed that this had developed 'in centres remote from the normal English traditions of culture'.²⁵ In contrast, the 'refined industrialism of electricity' and the technological developments of the second industrial revolution reflected a higher state intellectual activity. This was perceived to stem from the same historical and intellectual precedents as the rationalism that had informed Bath's Georgian architecture and planning. As such it was possible to view the city as a cultural and stylistic reference point in the 'intellectual apprehension' and expression of contemporary British modernity.²⁶

These developments enabled interpretations of continuity between Roman, Georgian and interwar Bath. In 1927 *The Times* described Bath as 'a city and idea', its architectural correspondent also claiming that 'from the Roman Baths to the present is but a single leap of the mind'.²⁷ The following year G.K. Chesterton stated that 'Bath is [...] a city of the Romans and the rationalist eighteenth century with something of a valley of oblivion in between'.²⁸ Almost a decade later Geoffrey Boumphrey wrote that 'in the presence of the Georgian Architecture you

might almost be in ancient Rome and not in modern England'.²⁹

In November 1931 modern Bathonians were claimed as 'children of the ancient Mother City' in a speech given in honour of the outgoing mayor Thomas Sturge Cotterell.³⁰ This connection had likely found inspiration in the spring of that year when Cotterell and a delegation of civic leaders undertook what the *Bath Chronicle* described as a 'pilgrimage' to Rome. The group visited recent excavations, was granted an audience with the Pope and at the end of the tour attended a farewell reception hosted by Mussolini.³¹

The commercial value of the perceived continuity with Bath's Roman heritage is illustrated by the advertising associated with the 1938 official Bath guide book that combined Roman imagery with the insignia of the two railways that serviced the city [figure 4].

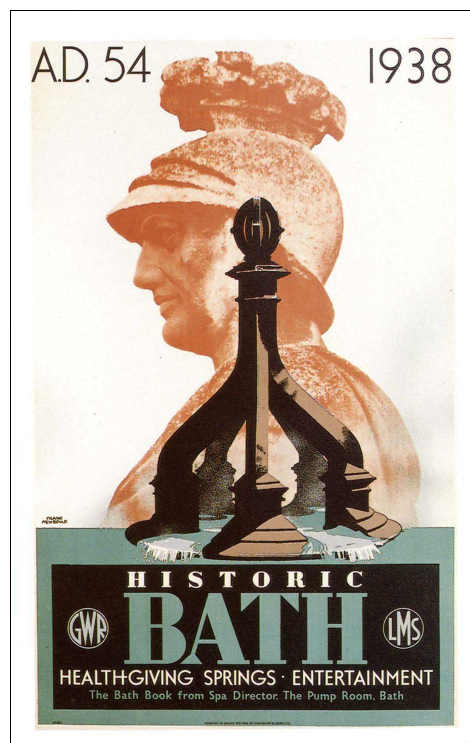


Figure 4: Promotional advertising illustrating the perceived continuity between Roman and Interwar Bath. Postcard reproduction (author's collection).

This is interesting for two reasons. Firstly it reflects the idea expressed at the beginning of the decade following the council leadership's visit to Rome, that a visit to Bath formed a historic and imperial pilgrimage. In September 1931,

R.W.M. Wright, the Bath City Librarian and Curator of the Victoria Art Gallery recorded in the conclusion to his history of the city published in *The Bath Chronicle* that 'Bath is a shrine of the Empire to which its citizens endeavour to pay a visit'.³² The addition of railway insignia provides a clear practical indication as to how such a pilgrimage could be undertaken.

Secondly it indicates the importance of historic appeal in boosting the city's tourist trade and local economy. Record visitor numbers were claimed throughout the interwar period as Bath became a year round destination.³³ This occurred against a backdrop of enduring national economic uncertainty and the competition posed by spas such as Harrogate. Having gained royal patronage before the Great War, the Yorkshire spa could boast patriotic credentials,³⁴ yet it lacked the historical components that made Bath integral to British national identity.

At the British Empire Exhibition that opened at Wembley in 1924, Bath exhibited a 'Georgian Pavilion and Garden' and claimed itself as 'The Premier Spa of the Empire'.³⁵ Continuity with the city's ancient balneal traditions was expressed by its Latin and English names that were cut through the building's parapet [figure 5].³⁶ Although the pavilion promoted Bath in a commercial sense, it could also be interpreted as a point of historic reference within a wider display of contemporary British modernity.

This was seen in the exhibition's neo-classical Palaces of Industry and Engineering that dominated the site. In terms of what Sophie Forgan describes as the aesthetic discourse integral to exhibition sites,³⁷ such buildings represented ideological statements of British cultural and technological hegemony over the colonies, whose own exhibits looked to non-secular traditions illustrated by replicas of Agra's Taj Mahal and Delhi's Jama Masjid.³⁸ This view is supported by the claim made by The Prince of Wales in the exhibition's opening speech, that Britain's empire was 'the most powerful agency of civilisation'.³⁹ The presence of Bath's Georgian Pavilion alongside stylistically consistent expressions of British modernity within the context of a significant imperial event can be seen as a means by which notions of historical authority were incorporated into claims about Britain's modern nationhood.

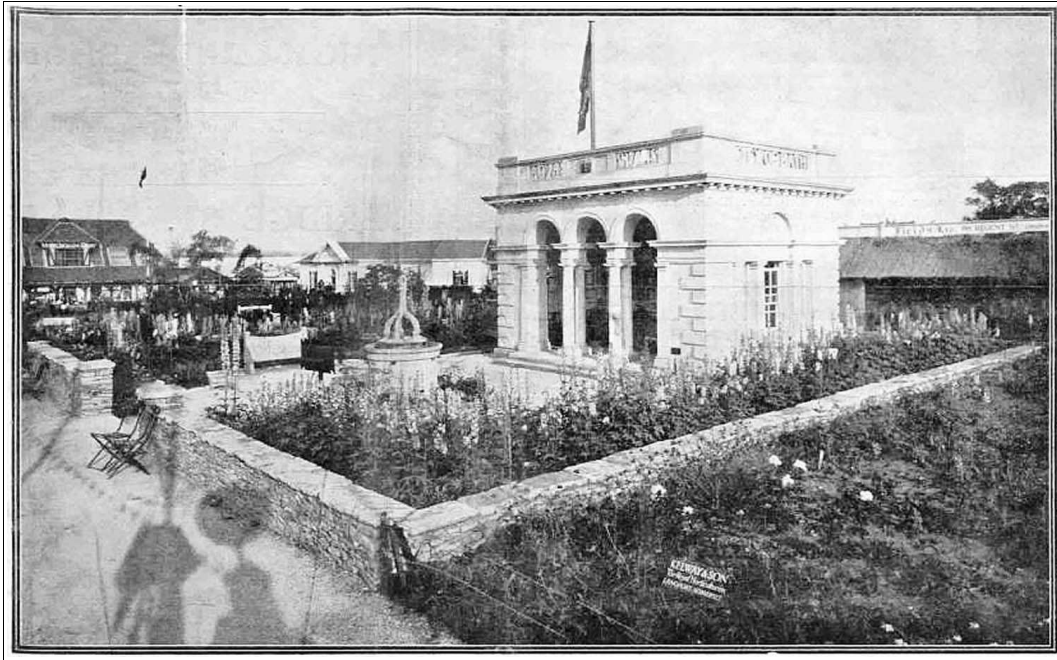


Figure 5: “Bath’s Headquarters at Wembley”, the Georgian Pavilion and Garden at the British Empire Exhibition. Press photograph, The Bath Chronicle, 5 July 1924, p.1 (© Local World Ltd. Image courtesy of British Library Board).

Bath’s positioning within contemporary understandings of modernity can also be understood in terms of the social functionalism and value consensus interpreted in its Georgian Architecture that expressed an idealised national character. In 1937 architect and founder of the Bauhaus school Walter Gropius observed that:

*Bath is my greatest discovery [...]it is first rate, even from the point of modern town planning. Your Georgian town planning expressed the Englishman, his instinct not to be too different, to think in terms of the whole street rather than of each separate house in it.*⁴⁰

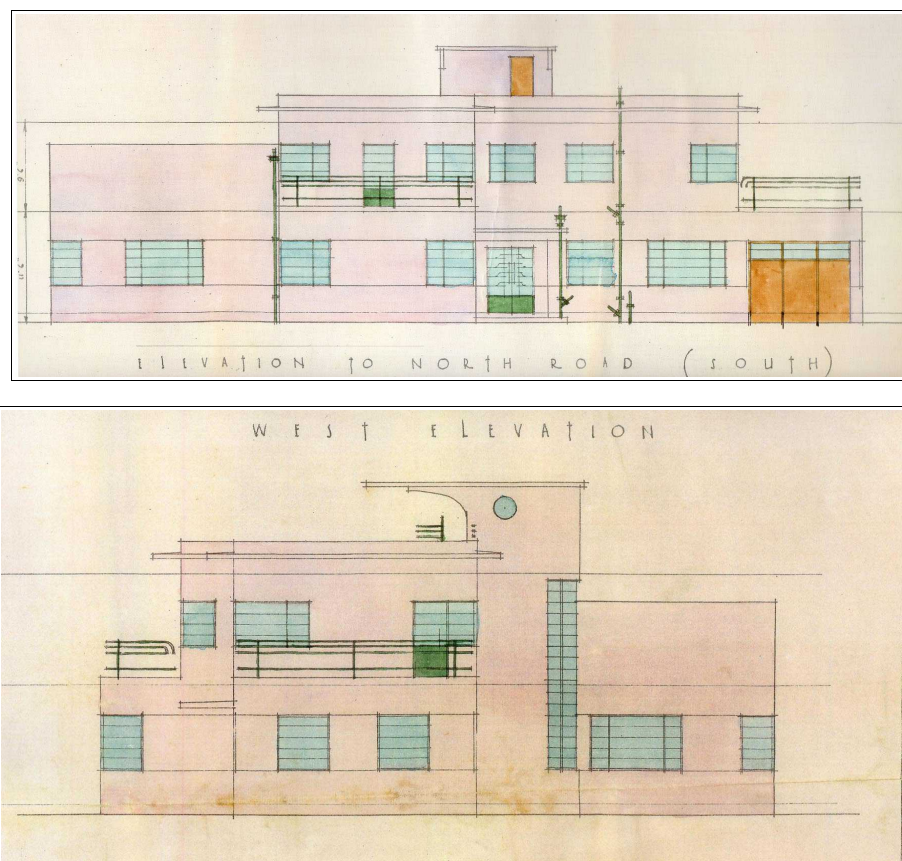
Bath’s Georgian architecture also illustrates what Gilbert Stelter describes as a relationship between aesthetic and social value. In this view classicism indicates a controllable world signified by rationality and planning which favours notions of stratification, social discipline and order.⁴¹ As such, an association with the language of classical architecture is to assume status within a prescribed social hierarchy.⁴² Consequently, when interpreted in a national contemporary context, Bath’s architecture represented a social metaphor and reflected a symbolic identity

and historically based moral authority that underpinned interwar Britain's guiding values in the face of social and political change.

Despite the industrial unrest and concerns about the rise of Bolshevism that followed the Great War,⁴³ concessions such as the Representation of the People Act in 1918 and the 1919 Housing Act, indicated that the conflict's disruptive impact on British society could be politically managed.⁴⁴ Consequently existing systems of social organisation remained largely intact. In 1920 the economist John Maynard Keynes observed that 'the outward aspect of life does not yet teach us that the age is over'.⁴⁵ Even with the political and economic uncertainties of the following decade, an abiding impetus to socio-political consensus and restraint can be interpreted in the landslide Conservative victory of 1931.

This contrasts with the contemporary recent history and experience of modernity in Germany, France, Italy and Finland that was informed by societal rupture, political transition and civil war.⁴⁶ This precipitated experimentation with new architectural forms that sought to develop an aesthetic based on a reinterpretation or self conscious rejection of tradition and an assertion of a modernity based on change. Next to such developments Britain stood, as the architectural historian John Summerson observed in 1930, 'a rather bewildered and almost inarticulate spectator'.⁴⁷

This is not to say that a self conscious aesthetic of modernity was absent in Britain's interwar architecture. Peter Behrens' New Ways in Northampton constructed in 1926 and Maxwell Fry's Kensall House and Berthold Lubetkin's Finsbury Health Centre both constructed in 1938 provide examples of an array of experimentation and a socially progressive desire to break with tradition. Yet in Bath the sole reflection of the Modern Movement was seen in Kilowatt House by Molly Gerrard (the daughter of City Architect Alfred J. Taylor) that was completed in 1938 [figure 6]. Furthermore, the principle of aesthetic control within the local planning legislation required it to be painted the colour of Bath stone rather than the Movement's emblematic white.⁴⁸



*Figure 6: Kilowatt House by Molly Gerrard. Elevation Drawings c.1936
(Bath Preservation Trust).*

This requirement was derived from a series of clauses within the far reaching 1925 Bath Corporation Act that became law in August of that year.⁴⁹ In addition to restrictions concerning alterations to existing buildings, it also informed a stylistic adherence to what were perceived as the city's architectural traditions.⁵⁰ Although a perceived failure to enforce these clauses prompted the 'revival' of the old Bath Preservation Society in 1929,⁵¹ the legislation produced an overall stylistic conformity in the array of new commercial buildings constructed in the city when compared with the more innovative features of contemporary building design.⁵²

As a result the products of aesthetic control could be seen as anachronistic. This lead one observer to note several years before the construction of Kilowatt House, that 'there is not one really fine piece of modern architecture in Bath'. The legislative determination of architectural style was dismissed as an attempt to speak a 'dead language [in a] modern accent' and a handicap that made 'any real

architecture impossible of achievement'.⁵³ In an analogy shaped by the contemporary understanding of the period as an age dominated by machines,⁵⁴ it was argued that:

*The Artist is as much a creator as the patentee of a machine. And you can't confine a mechanical engineer to the limitations of 18th century mechanics without stopping progress (that is civilisation). The same applies to the architect.*⁵⁵

This might be seen to anticipate the forms of architectural and urban change experienced in the city during the period that followed the Second World War as Britain redefined itself socially and technologically. Although beyond the periodic scope of this study, it highlights a transition in the perceived significance and relevance of Bath's historic built environment that resulted from the election of a 'social democratic government with a large and unimpeachable mandate for social change'.⁵⁶ This was expressed in the 1951 Festival of Britain and the large scale experimentation with a self consciously modern aesthetic in British architecture and planning. Whilst the Festival enabled Bath to promote itself as an expression of a national historic identity,⁵⁷ the social metaphor and traditions interpreted in its Georgian architecture had no place amid the newly defined modernity displayed at the Festival's main exhibition and the new society it represented.⁵⁸

Chapter Two

Bath in the Mechanical Age and the Reception and Impact of New Transport Technologies.

Even in these days of aeroplanes, wireless telegraphy and the other adjuncts to a strenuous modernity, there are still some places in this much maligned old country of ours that continue on their way undisturbed through the ages ... Such is the city of Bath.

Bradford Allan, 1913.¹

The increased interest in Bath's history took place against a backdrop of rapid developments in motor vehicle and aeronautical transport technologies. These stood to boost the city's prosperity but represented perceived and actual threats to its population and built environment. As the car outpaced society's ability to recognise and adapt to the dangers it posed, thousands died on Britain's roads whilst mass production made it accessible to ever-greater numbers of new drivers. At the same time the aeroplane was integral to modernity's ameliorative promise that in Bath was reflected by civic ambitions to develop an aerodrome like those under construction throughout the nation.

Yet in a period framed by the experience and anticipation of mechanised total war, the aeroplane's destructive capability was seemingly never far from the core anxieties of the age. In August 1936 audiences at Bath's Odeon Cinema witnessed what the *Bath Chronicle* described as a 'prophetic vision of events'.² The opening minutes of Alexander Korda's production of H.G. Wells' *Things to Come* depicted the aerial bombardment of the fictional British capital *Everytown* in the near future of Christmas 1940 as the consequence of a European build-up of arms. This was not the film's main point though, but an expression of wider concerns that humanity had not yet reached the intellectual maturity to master the machines it created.³

From the mid to late nineteenth century to its peak during the interwar decades

there grew a consciousness in western culture that life was increasingly dominated by the machine.⁴ In 1932 the industrial designer Norman Bel Geddes observed that:

*Although we built the machines we have not become at ease with them and have not mastered them [...] Rapidly multiplying our products, creating and glorifying the gadget we have been inferior craftsmen, the victims rather than the masters of our ingenuity.*⁵

The utopian denouement of *Things to Come* depicted humanity's mechanical mastery and a technocratic world a century hence in 2036.⁶ Yet for the science fiction writer John Gloag, who like Wells looked forward to a 'Golden Machine Age', the contemporary era was one defined by confusion and transition:

*To-day we admit the possibilities and dangers of machines and those who perceive that mobile machines are destroying traditional conceptions of security, both in a military and civic sense, are reluctant to admit that the Machine Age demands new, untried forms of life in cities and the countryside.*⁷

Aerial bombardment meant that people would be forced to live with 'a new kind of power and a new focus of fear'.⁸ The belief that the Great War had resulted from an arms race led Britain to unsuccessfully propose the banning of aerial bombardment under international law at the 1933 Geneva disarmament conference.⁹ In Bath, local opposition to aerial bombardment was first reported in 1933 and posed by the League of Nations Union and the Bath Anti War Council.¹⁰ The latter went on to organise a counter demonstration to the Empire Day celebrations of 1934 where the *Internationale* was sung and aerial bombardments conducted by the Royal Air Force in India and Iraq condemned as indicative of the 'suppressive nature of British Imperialism'.¹¹

Local opposition to the aerial bombardments received little coverage in *The Bath Chronicle* in comparison to what might be seen as everyday aspects of local and national news. Whilst this might suggest an editorial bias informed by a self proclaimed Conservative political stance and the city's imperial self image,¹² it

might also indicate (at least until the late 1930s), a perceived isolation from such issues among the city's population, even as the situation in Europe appeared more threatening. In 1935 the city was accused of apathy towards the possibility of aerial bombardment when Government led civil defence preparations were first initiated.¹³ At a Bathavon Rural District Council meeting in August 1936 it was complained that 'this sort of thing led to a war mind and a war spirit and caused them to think that war was coming'.¹⁴ In 1937 a Local Authority Air Raid Precautions Committee was set up but received an 'inadequate' response to its call for volunteers,¹⁵ whilst the Bath Red Cross had only recruited three volunteers out of the two hundred it had intended to train.¹⁶

The destruction wrought upon Bath by aerial bombardment in April 1942 forms the most significant event in the city's twentieth century social and local historiography and marks a watershed in that of its architectural preservation. Despite preparations as 'an insurance' against the possibility of aerial bombardment in the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War, it was seemingly inconceivable in the minds of many. During the Great War, the city praised by Bradford Allan in 1913 for its aloofness to modernity experienced an increase in visitors who, the *Saturday Review* claimed in 1918, came to Bath not for the cure but 'in fear of air raids in London'.¹⁷ That it was still not fully considered a military target at the start of the Second World War, even though the destruction of Guernica in 1937 had set the precedent that all cities were at risk,¹⁸ is suggested by the Admiralty's relocation to the city and its role as a receiving point for evacuees in the early stages of the conflict.¹⁹

Although military aviation would be the vector for unprecedented destruction, its civil counterpart formed a defining technological feature of interwar modernity that was reflected in the widespread construction of municipal aerodromes from the late 1920s. In June 1931 *Aircraft Engineering* reported that '170 towns are taking an interest in the desirability of providing facilities for aeroplanes' whilst Bristol was one of eight that already possessed a municipal aerodrome.²⁰ Despite what seemed to be a national enthusiasm for flight, opinion was divided in Bath over the development of aviation in the city and proposals to construct an aerodrome of its own.

Aviation's popular appeal in Bath originated in the 1920s when the plateau at Lansdown located several miles to the north west of the city acted as a temporary airfield for companies offering pleasure flights.²¹ In June 1932 a two day air pageant held at the site by the aviation pioneer Sir Alan Cobham was attended by several thousand visitors. It was estimated that 600 people took pleasure flights on its first day, enabling them to see Bath from a 'fascinating and unusual angle'.²²

This is significant in that it can be seen as a point from which the novel perspective and understanding of the city's built environment and landscape enabled by powered flight entered the realm of public experience. Despite a different rate of cultural assimilation,²³ it can be seen as an equivalent to the changes in the experience and perception of 'geographical space' that resulted from the rapid growth of railway transport a century earlier.²⁴ The contemporary popularity of this new perspective on the city is evidenced by a series of aerial photographs titled 'The Queen City from the Air' that were published over eight weeks in 1935 on consecutive front pages of the Saturday edition of *The Bath Chronicle* [figure 7].



Figure 7: “Queen City From the Air”, aerial photograph featured on the front page of *The Bath Chronicle*, 19 October 1935
(© Local World Ltd. Image courtesy of British Library Board).

Despite its popularity, the air pageant prompted complaints from the Watch Committee who saw aviation displays as incongruous with the more genteel aspects of the city's identity. In what was an unsuccessful attempt to ban Sunday flying the town clerk was directed to write to the Under Secretary of State for Air, stating that:

*Sunday entertainments of this character are neither encouraged or desired in this City which caters not so much for Sunday pleasure seekers, but rather for invalids who come to Bath for their health's sake.*²⁵

The commercial advantages of air traffic to Bath were first demonstrated in 1912 by Capt A. E. Hopkins in a pioneering two way air mail flight to the city from London.²⁶ They were stressed again in 1928 when the Air Council wrote to the council outlining the necessity of an aerodrome to 'every town of any importance'. It was claimed that any delay in the construction of an 'airway station' through a 'lack of vision and enterprise' would cause Bath to become a 'tributary to Bristol' as had happened in a recent reorganisation of the region's postal and telegraphic services.²⁷

For Bath's technological optimists, aviation stood to revolutionise the city's urban transportation with the mooted possibility that one day there might be a 'species of air taxi or bus' across the city to connect with the 'monsters of the air' that might one day land at the earmarked site at Lansdown.²⁸ Yet despite the novelty of air pageants, aerial photography and aviation's claimed commercial necessity many Bathonians viewed the development of an aerodrome with suspicion. In July 1933 Thomas Loel Guinness, Conservative MP for Bath and Parliamentary Secretary to the Under Secretary for Air,²⁹ addressed constituents, stating that 'You will never regret the day you decide to foster and encourage an airport in this district'.³⁰ This was countered by objections raised about the dangers of 'having aeroplanes buzzing round the city, landing in the streets or catching fire and falling onto houses'.³¹ The ongoing suspicion of aviation held by many of the city's residents led Guinness to remark several years later that 'the people in this constituency are not sufficiently air-minded'.³²

Despite commercial and technological optimism associated with aviation and the opposition ranged against it, terrestrial concerns and practicality would ultimately underpin the city council's decision not to construct an aerodrome. In addition to what was seen as an insufficient volume of air traffic to justify its development, the project was obstructed in 1936 by controversy over the potential loss of the Lansdown plateau's amenity and the refusal of the Lansdown Golf Club to relinquish its land.³³ Finally, in 1938 it was recognised in that the aerodrome at Whitchurch to the south of Bristol was 'only eight miles from Bath and that distance was one that could easily be served by motor car'.³⁴

This anticlimactic conclusion to Bath's aviation ambitions is significant in that it masks the more profound and enduring impact of the motor car upon the city. As George Trevelyan would observe six years later with a hindsight shaped by Britain's bombed cityscapes, that whilst:

*The aeroplane could violate the thousand-year-old sanctities of the peaceful island [...] the new age of motor traction on the roads made a more rapid social and economic revolution in the first forty years of the twentieth century than railways and machinery had made before.*³⁵

The urban pressures created by the motor car were perhaps at their most extreme in Bath where the city's historic character and fabric were confronted by the claimed highest per capita rate of car ownership for any British city with 3166 licensed cars for a population of 68,200 in 1937.³⁶ Traffic volumes had increased by up to 173 percent between 1925 and 1938,³⁷ a figure likely compounded by the city promoting itself as a 'motoring centre',³⁸ suburban expansion and the relative affluence of many of its residents.

The requirement to rationalise traffic flow in the city would form primary features of the unrealised Abercrombie and Buchanan Plans of 1945 and 1963. Less recognised is the motor car's impact on the city's built environment during the interwar period. This saw the creation and widening of streets in an attempt to address problems of congestion that along with the addition of new physical features and a changing urban soundscape, reflected and signified new forms of

danger that transformed the ways in which the city's public spaces were perceived, understood and experienced.

The problem of traffic congestion occurred in relation to developments in transport technology in the first decades of the twentieth century. These saw the rapid transition from forms of animal drawn transport that were 'rooted in prehistory' to those that developed out of the innovations in electrical and petrochemical engineering of the second industrial revolution.³⁹ From the time it replaced its horse drawn predecessor in January 1904 until the beginning of the First World War, the Bath Electric Tramway was a primary enabling technology in Bath's suburban expansion where it extended beyond existing areas of development. A further product of electric tramway systems such as Bath's was a functional and perceptual shift in street spaces reflected in improvements to road surfaces that in turn enabled increasing volumes of motorized traffic [figure 8].⁴⁰



Figure 8: New and old urban transportation at the Old Bridge. Note road studs to indicate a crossing point and newly constructed buildings including the Bath Corporation Electricity Department Headquarters to the right of the image.

Postcard, c.1935 (author's collection).

However as Bath's tramway system aged it represented a major cause of traffic congestion. With any incentive to upgrade the system precluded by a clause in the 1870 Tramways Act that enabled a local authority buyout at cost after twenty-one years,⁴¹ the system was destined for obsolescence. By the mid 1930s what had been described as 'rapid transit' when services started,⁴² clogged the streets at an average speed of eight miles per hour, obstructing motorised traffic.⁴³ By 1936 it was recognised that the 'conditions of traffic in which [the trams] were instituted no longer exist' and the system was closed in May 1939.⁴⁴

The problems of congestion and increased traffic volumes attain human significance when considered in relation to the new dangers introduced into the urban environment by motor vehicles. In 1930, the equation of the rapid growth of vehicle ownership and an embryonic understanding of road safety and methods of traffic management resulted in a national death toll of 7302 with a further 178,000 injured. More than half the fatalities were pedestrians, a figure that was only slightly reduced in 1935 when there were 6502 fatalities although total injuries had increased to 222,000.⁴⁵

In 1934 Bath experienced a total of 964 traffic accidents, four fatalities and 336 injuries, an increase on the previous year's figures of 793 accidents with ten fatalities and 306 injuries.⁴⁶ The 1934 figures led to the identification of the city's accident 'black spots' and in 1935 measures were proposed and implemented to improve road safety. These included the painting of white lines to demarcate traffic lanes and the fixing of white rubber road studs to indicate the location of pedestrian crossings accompanied by the proposed introduction of fifty two Belisha Beacons.⁴⁷

Named after the then Minister of Transport, Leslie Hore-Belisha, the black and later black and white striped pole crowned with an amber globe (that would later contain a flashing light) was seen both as an amusing novelty and an indication of the state's garish and unwelcome presence in British cities.⁴⁸ The beacons were opposed by city councils that objected not only to their appearance but also their cost and lack of proven efficacy given that pedestrians, it was claimed, were reluctant to use road crossings in general.⁴⁹

Bristol's city council claimed that it was compelled to erect Belisha Beacons at three hundred locations in the city by the Ministry of Transport's power to carry out the works regardless and to reclaim the cost as civil debt.⁵⁰ In contrast, Bath's council acknowledged the potential consequences of a failure to act and although 'not in the least enamoured of "these wretched beacons"' it recognised their claimed effectiveness in London and conceded that without them it would have to bear responsibility for any continuation of the city's high accident toll.⁵¹

Bath's road casualty figures for 1937 in which there were five fatalities and 341 injuries in the first eleven months suggest the beacons did little to improve road safety in the city.⁵² However they should be viewed in the context of a wider uncertainty about road use, the relative priorities of motorists and pedestrians and changes in road safety advice when the subject itself was in its infancy.

This is illustrated by *Highway Code* that in 1931 advised motorists to use the car horn when 'approaching a danger point or when overtaking'.⁵³ By 1935, when the compulsory driving test was introduced, this advice had been discredited and in 1937 a proposal was made in Bath to ban the use of the motor horn altogether.⁵⁴ This expanded on the night time bans already implemented in the city as well as in central London and a small number of British towns and cities.⁵⁵ Although opposed by many motorists and the R.A.C., the measure evidences an attitudinal changes towards hazard perception. This was recognised in *The Bath Chronicle* that quoted an observation made in *The Times*, that the horn was no longer seen as an 'instrument of safety but as 'safety's greatest enemy' its use encouraging 'the bad driver to go full speed into danger'.⁵⁶

Another factor seen to determine levels of traffic danger in Bath was the reception of high volumes of traffic 'into an irregular network of roads'.⁵⁷ Under the 1925 Bath Act a number of street widening schemes were implemented along with the creation of two new streets linking St James Parade with Southgate Street and Westgate Buildings with Avon Street to accompany the construction of the Forum cinema and the Cooperative Society Headquarters.

In both instances the works occurred on sites not considered historically or

architecturally important.⁵⁸ In contrast the improvements conducted at Terrace Walk in 1933 to extend the The Grand Parade and link it with Pierrepont Street stirred controversy due to the demolition of the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institute. Noted for its imposing Doric portico, it had stood on the site since 1824 but now impeded traffic between the Orange Grove and the GWR station [figures 9 and 10].⁵⁹



*Figure 9: The Royal Literary Institute by George Underwood, 1824.
Photograph c.1920s (Bath Central Library/Bath in Time).*

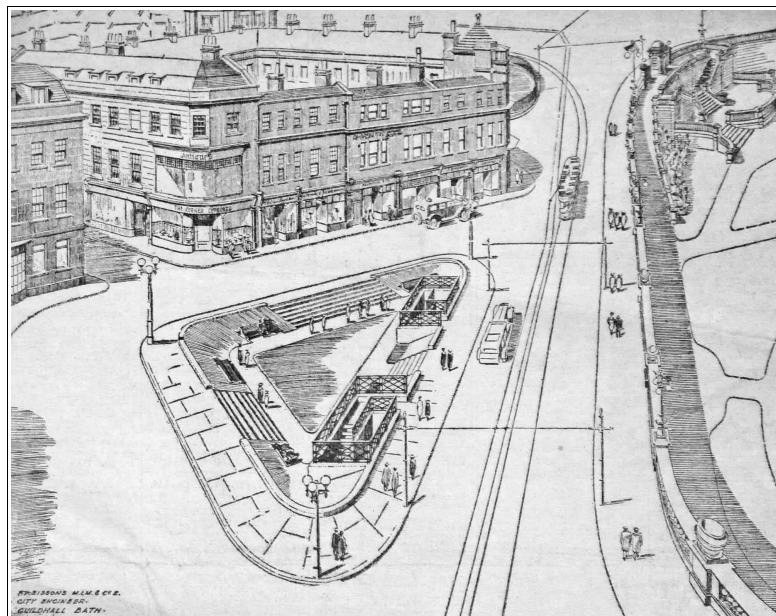


Figure 10: Proposed improvements at Terrace Walk. Drawing by Frank .P. Sissons, Bath Chronicle, December 1932 (press cutting, Museum of Bath Architecture/Bath Preservation Trust Archive).

Whilst such developments may have ameliorated traffic congestion in their immediate area, they did little to address that experienced in the northern and eastern parts of the city centre. An attempt to address this was made in 1935 with a traffic rationalisation and urban improvement proposal that also sought to boost trade in these areas by increasing motor vehicle access. The scale of the scheme necessitated the demolition of over 600 central area properties and brought the newly formed Bath Preservation Trust into 'sharp conflict' with the city council,⁶⁰ as well as prompting national controversy and opposition.

The impact of the car and traffic volumes on Bath's historic fabric presented a parallel to that occurring in the countryside. Car ownership had given the urban middle classes freedom to explore Britain's countryside, turning it into an 'object of urban consumption' in which idealised notions of rural life were defined in opposition to notions of the proletarian seaside resort.⁶¹ Given Bath's historical associations and spa facilities, the city could claim a similar demographic appeal. Contemporary official guidebooks described it as a 'motoring centre' that offered 'exceptional facilities' and was surrounded by 'picturesque old villages [...] and all the charms of the beautiful West Country'.⁶²

In addition to the plethora of food, drink, retail and mechanical services offered to motorists by rural entrepreneurs, advertisements promoted the intrusion of a commercial aesthetic of mass production.⁶³ Such developments were significant of wider changes in the rural economy that had prompted the formation of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England in 1926. In 1929 the Old Bath Preservation Society raised parallel concerns about the commercialisation and 'disfigurement of the countryside', describing it as 'great evil of modern conditions' and expressed a desire to prevent such 'detrimental or incongruous introductions' in the city.⁶⁴ In October 1931 the Council for the Preservation of Rural England held its fourth national conference in Bath. The warm reception it received from the Old Bath Preservation Society was indicative of the two bodies' close affiliation. In a poetic 'prologue of welcome' Bath's pre-industrial character was as distanced from the 'bustling' commercial towns whose populations sought careless refuge in the countryside, indicating that both bodies perceived the same destructive factors to be acting on their respective spheres of concern.⁶⁵

Whilst street advertising had long antedated the motor car in Bath, there is the sense that the car was seen as both cause and symptom of a hastening in culturally destabilising commercial forces. These were felt to threaten not just the city's Georgian built environment and the values it stood for, but the ancient therapeutic basis its historic identity. Such concerns are illustrated by two watercolour drawings produced in 1926 that humorously depict Milsom Street and the Pump Rooms adorned with advertising and juxtaposed with a passing motor car [figures 11 and 12].

The first depicts a pedestrian filled Milsom Street illuminated by advertisements for soap, motorised transport, department stores and the contemporary backache remedy *Doan's Kidney Pills* and coincides with the formation of the city council's Illuminated Signs Sub-Committee in February 1926.⁶⁶ It is notable for its allusion to the diurnally changing legibility of urban spaces resulting from commercial illumination. The prominence of the illuminated advertisements over the shaded Georgian buildings evidences an awareness of what Anne Cronin describes as their capacity to transform and become 'integral to the character' of city areas such as at London's Piccadilly Circus, and create commodity associations as people move between them.⁶⁷



Figure 11: Milsom Street and Illuminated Advertising. Watercolour drawing Painting, artist unknown, c.1926 (Bath Record Office).

In the second painting, these associations are combined with an affront to the spirit of Bath's healing traditions as well as its dignified position in British culture. Advertisements strongly suggestive of the constipation and rheumatism remedy *Kruschen Salts* adorn Thomas Baldwin's colonnade and obscure the relief of Hygieia within its pediment. The adjoining Grand Pump Room that is arguably the eponymous city's defining Georgian structure, is covered by fertiliser advertisements, its entablature inscription “APIΣTON MENYΔΩP” and Corinthian portico obscured by an advertisement for guano.



Figure 12. The Grand Pump Rooms and colonnade adorned with advertising. Watercolour drawing, artist unknown, c.1926 (Bath Record Office).

Both paintings reflect the concern that the city's 'old world charm and atmosphere [...] were to be sold for filthy lucre'.⁶⁸ Furthermore given the locations depicted, the paintings might be seen to exhibit a lack of faith in the decision by the council not to allow the illuminated advertising to be fixed to the significant number of city centre properties that it owned,⁶⁹ despite the principles laid out in the 1925 Bath Corporation Act. This notion is given weight by the criticisms levelled at the city council in previous decades about the perceived priority it afforded to civic finances over architectural value and which 1929 would be a prompting factor in the revival of the Old Bath Preservation Society.⁷⁰

In a period framed by the experience and anticipation of industrialised conflict, the image of Bath as a city 'undisturbed through the ages' stood in opposition to the notion of the machine age. This was reflected during the mid 1930s by the accusations of apathy levelled at the city with regard to the possibility of aerial bombardment. At the same time Bath's technological aspiration to civil aviation that was seen in the success of its air pageant and the optimism at the possibility of an 'air taxi' was countered by anxieties over safety among a city population said to be insufficiently 'air minded'.⁷¹

Ultimately, proposals to develop a municipal aerodrome were undermined by the practical advantages of the motor car. Yet high rates of car ownership and congestion created new urban dangers and perceptual and physical changes in city spaces. At the same time the car as a symbol of aspirational consumption underpinned profound social change that propelled a commercial incursion into the countryside and the dismantling of centuries of tradition. This was seen as comparable with the cultural threats that it posed to Bath's unique historic character. As the interwar period progressed increasing levels motorised traffic placed the city under ever greater pressure to adapt not only in terms of its associated infrastructure and planning but also to capitalise on the commercial opportunities it represented.

Chapter Three

Modern Dreams: Bath's Interwar City Improvement Schemes.

The city must either go forwards or backwards.

Alfred Wills, Alderman of Bath, October 1935.¹

The provision of good facilities and a visually appealing environment to attract visitors has been a key factor in ensuring Bath's prosperity as a spa and commercial centre and has formed a central feature of its municipal politics. The city's Georgian ascendancy was predicated on a programme of construction that reflected both a cultural and fashionable alignment with London and an economically driven 'urban renaissance' of English towns.² Yet its decline in the nineteenth century, though partly attributable to changing fashion can be seen in the light of industrialisation and the growth of urban slums. This contrasted sharply with its simultaneously developing image as a retirement centre for the genteel classes drawn to the crescents and squares of its upper town.

Decline was also precipitated by developments in transport. During the nineteenth century the railway had been perceived as a key to Bath's revitalisation.³ Yet in the twentieth century it was seen to facilitate competition from other spa centres. In 1914 it was recognised that:

*It is, under ordinary circumstances, almost as easy to go to a French or German Spa as it is an English resort [...]in addition to the developments at the foreign resorts, Harrogate, Buxton, Llandindron Wells, Strathpeffer and Droitwich have all made great strides since any serious addition was made to the Baths of Bath and are now keen competitors for our visitors.*⁴

The years preceding the Great War had seen a number of improvement proposals of varying ambition aimed at 'The Baths Question'.⁵ Those calling for the schemes believed the decline stemmed from a lack of municipal investment. In 1912 the council's spending commitments were dominated by the requirement to upgrade

its main drainage and sewerage systems at a cost of a quarter of a million pounds.⁶ By 1913 Bath's municipal deficit amounted to almost £700,000.⁷

In contrast Harrogate had spent almost the same amount on its spa facilities as Bath had on its infrastructure, had gained royal patronage and was marketing itself as 'The Nation's Spa'.⁸ Bath's ongoing decline seemed almost insurmountable, one observer noting that only 'heroic measures' could reverse the situation in what was held to be a 'critical period' of the city's history.⁹ However the increase in visitors to Bath at the start of the Great War saw an improvement in the city's fortunes. This created practical problems of how to cope with the increased custom 'to such an extent as to render the further extension of bathing and entertainment facilities imperative'.¹⁰

In 1915 the council commissioned the architect Robert Atkinson to produce a scheme of improvements. The resulting proposal was founded on a highly detailed survey and presented in a series of perspective wash drawings that indicated its monumental scale. The intended centrepiece was a sunken forum constructed adjacent to the Abbey and Roman Baths to be accompanied by a concert hall, Roman museum, new bathing establishments, winter gardens, libraries and a remodelled Grand Parade [figures 13, 14 and 15].¹¹

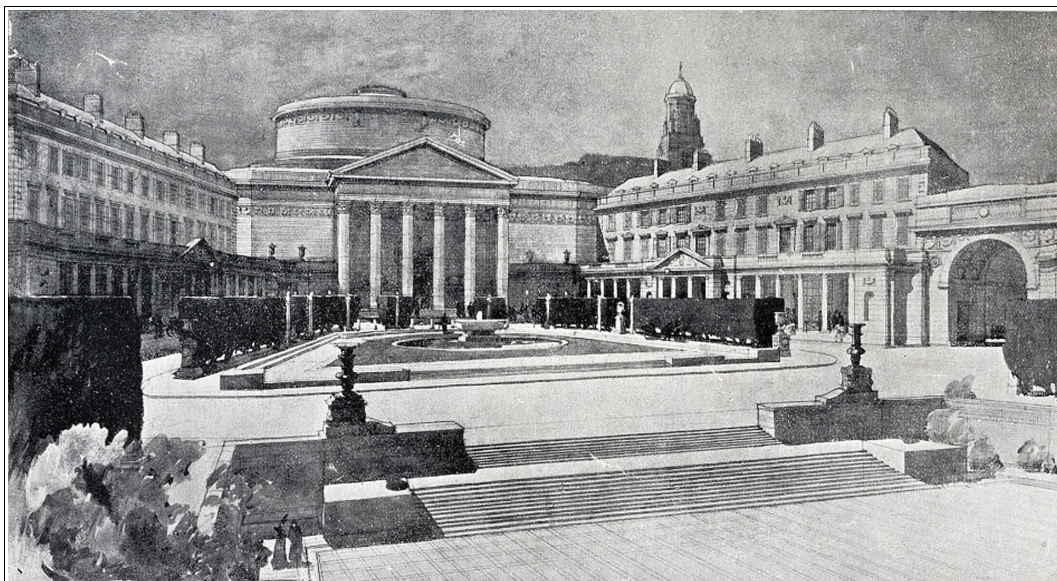


Figure 13 Impression of new Concert Hall. Wash drawing by Robert Atkinson, 1916 (Bath Central Library/Bath in Time).

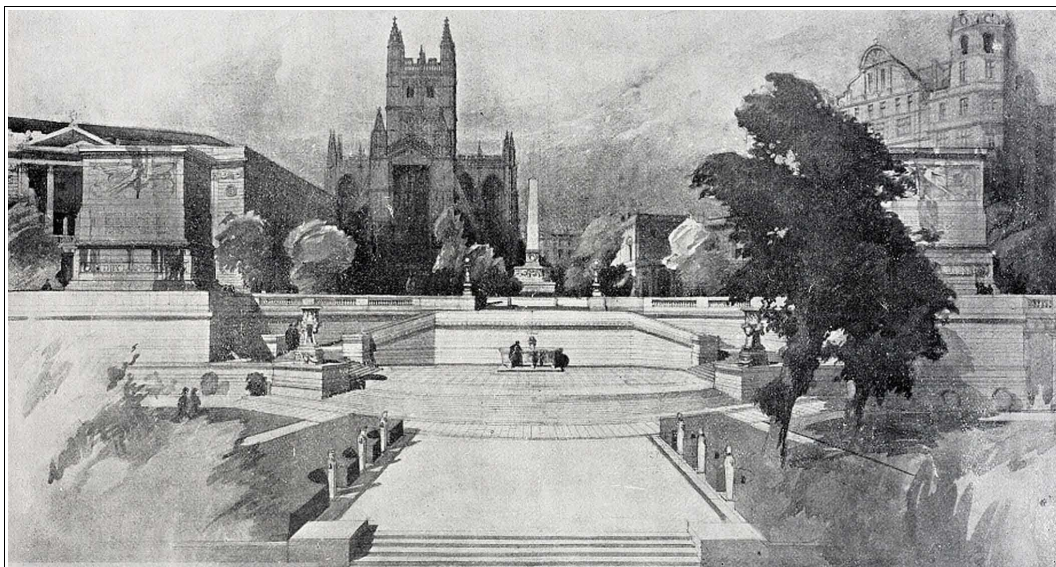


Figure 14: Impression of remodelled Parade Gardens and Orange Grove. Wash drawing by Robert Atkinson, 1916 (Bath Central Library/Bath in Time).

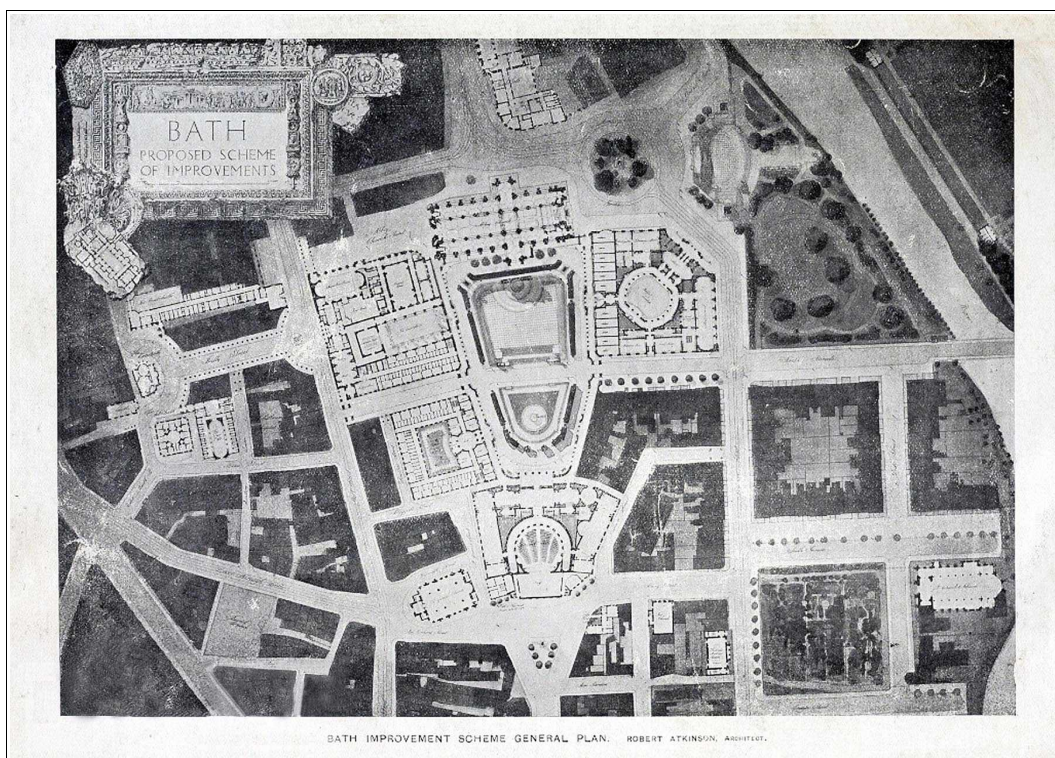


Figure 15: "Bath Improvement Scheme General Plan". Wash drawing by Robert Atkinson, 1916 (Bath Central Library/Bath in Time).

Atkinson's scheme was widely acclaimed and the drawings were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1916. *The British Architect* noted that:

Mr Atkinson's fine wash drawings are very convincing and show with telling

*effect the grouping of the buildings round the sunk forum looking towards the Abbey in one case, and towards the new concert hall in another. The plan is most interesting, and shows what variety of promenade and good architectural views would be created. It is essentially what would be desirable in a city given over to recuperation and pleasure.*¹²

The scale of Atkinson's proposal meant there 'was not the slightest probability' of its realisation. The war and the vast financial obligation that the scheme represented placed it 'outside "practical politics" for a very long period'.¹³ Ultimately the financial burden of the 1919 Housing Act that obliged the council to prepare and implement housing schemes, caused Atkinson's proposal to be discarded.¹⁴

Despite this, Atkinson's proposal is significant, as the archaeological references contained in its title illustration indicate [figure 16], in that it evoked Bath's classical heritage at a time when the rhetoric of Roman civilisation was increasingly pertinent. As such it can be seen to reflect a desire to engender a sense of patriotic historical community and local and national identity that rejected the immediate Victorian past and sought inspiration from what, as the Bath Historical Pageant had indicated, was increasingly held as the true origin of British civilisation.

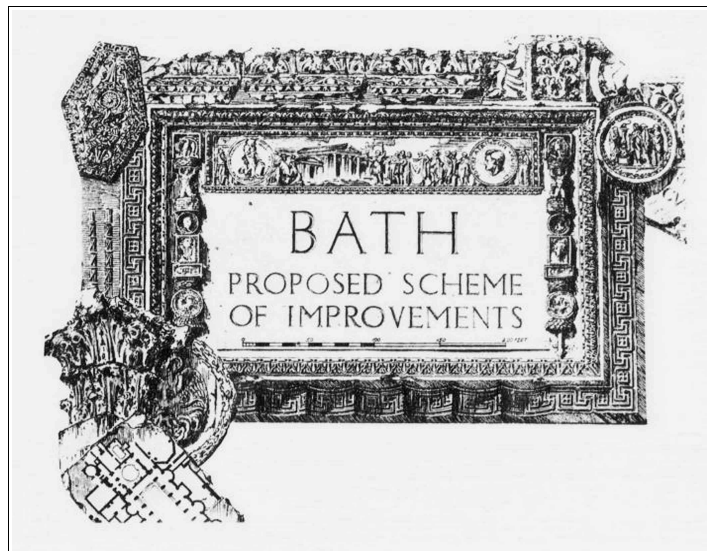


Figure 16: Title illustration to Robert Atkinson's 'Proposed Scheme of Improvements' (Academy Architecture and Architectural Review 1916).

Atkinson's proposal sought to modernise Bath for an increasing number of spa visitors and through the inclusion of a Roman museum, libraries and a concert hall expressed a cultural emphasis. After the Great War there was a shift in the priorities of subsequent civic improvement proposals towards slum clearance, commercial development and traffic rationalisation.

In January 1925 *The Bath Chronicle* published a series of illustrations in support of a proposed scheme that formed part of the Bath Improvement Bill that was to be presented to Parliament that year. Its largest feature was the redevelopment of the flood prone Broad Quay and the 'old and squalid' area of Avon Street and Corn Street to its rear. Readily seen from trains passing on the Great Western Railway, this was the most visible of the city's slums and perceived as its most notorious and intractable.¹⁵ During the nineteenth century it had been noted for its slaughterhouses, waste from which was discarded directly into the river accompanied by the untreated sewage that was also discharged there.³¹ In 1852, three years after a cholera epidemic in the area,³² *The Leisure Hour* remarked that:

*The visitor is not to suppose that Bath is all beauty. On the low-lying lands on the bank of the river to the west there is a region of filth squalor and demoralisation, where poverty and crime lurk in miserable companionship.*³³

In its place would be a riverside boulevard lined with 'fine buildings in the neoclassical style', that was intended to create an 'almost direct line of communication' between the city's two railway stations and boost the lower town's commercial sector [figures 17, 18, 19 and 20].¹⁶

The Bill would later become the 1925 Bath Corporation Act. This enabled the city to establish the principle of aesthetic control and implement improvement schemes without having to develop an overall town planning scheme that might restrict new building, as required by the 1925 Town Planning Act.¹⁷ The riverside boulevard represented one of eighteen proposed improvement schemes with an estimated total cost of £600,000,¹⁸ this far in excess of the proposed £19,000 to be spent on improving the city's bathing establishment.¹⁹ Despite its cost, the scheme received a vote of approval from a 'substantial majority' of Bath's ratepayers in

attendance at a city council meeting at the Guildhall on 10th January 1925,²⁰ although concerns were expressed that such an expensive scheme was being contemplated without their assent.²¹

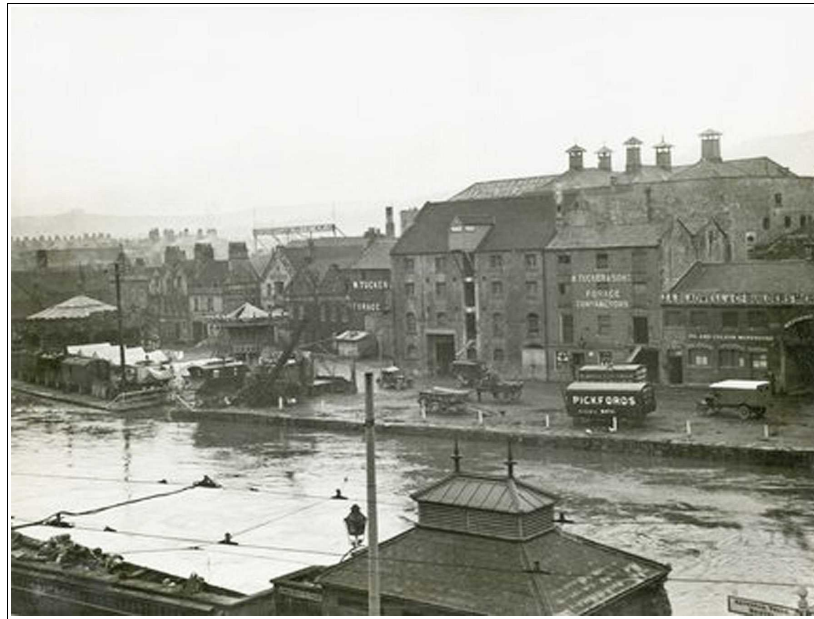


Figure 17: Broad Quay. Photograph c.1920 (Bath in Time/Bath Central Library).



Figure 18: Impression of proposed improvement of the Corn Street area. Graphite and watercolour by drawing Arthur Cecil Fare and photographs, The Bath Chronicle, 10 January 1925 p.14C (© Local World Ltd. Image courtesy of British Library Board).

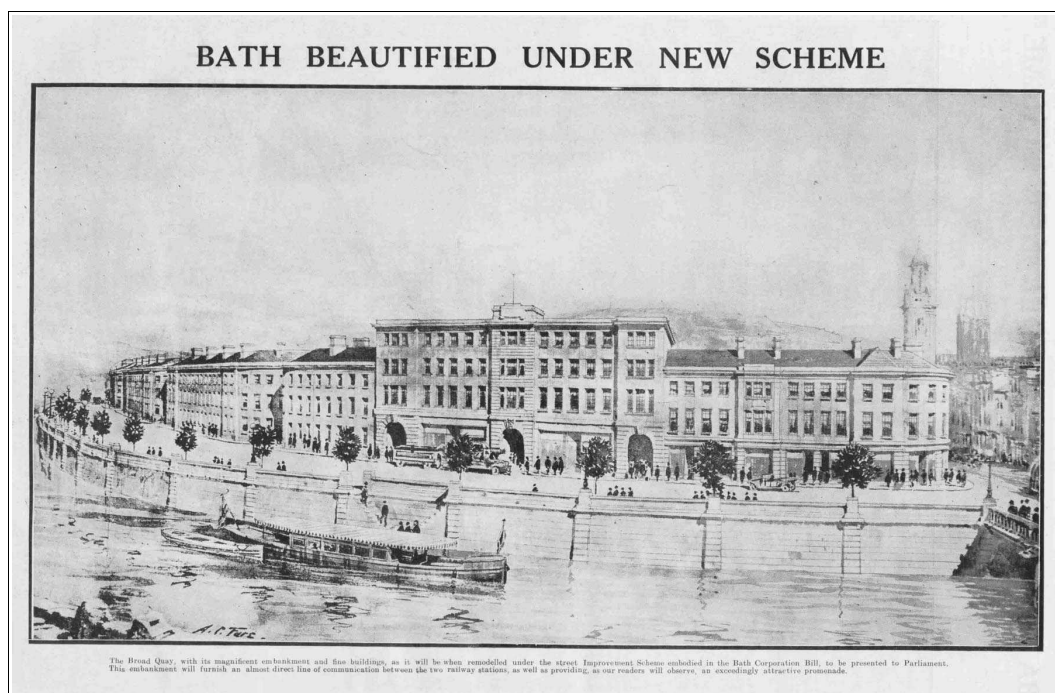


Figure 19: Impression depicting 'Broad Quay, with its magnificent embankment and fine buildings as will be when remodelled under the Street Improvement Scheme embodied in the Bath Corporation Bill'. Graphite and watercolour drawing by Arthur Cecil Fare,

The Bath Chronicle, 10 January 1925 p.14B

(© Local World Ltd. Image courtesy of British Library Board) .

The Bill was opposed by the Bath branch of the National Citizens Union. Originally formed in 1919 as the Middle Class Union, it sought to protect the interests of 'the smaller trading, propertied and professional classes' and several local members were later involved in the formation of the Bath Preservation Trust.²² It complained that the scheme could increase rates by 3 shillings, whilst the construction of new shops would divert trade from existing businesses and depreciate the value of their premises. Moreover, it was argued that the Bill would lead to the demolition of Chandos House and the Royal Literary and Scientific Institute, and that the council had failed to make provision to rehouse Avon Street area residents whilst the works were being conducted.²³

Following the initial vote of approval, the National Citizens Union demanded that the matter be put to a vote of Bath's ratepayers and a poll was conducted on 24th

January 1925.²⁴ Less than a third of the city's 37,126 eligible voters turned out, but a result of 6185 for and 4191 against provided the council with a mandate to place the Bill before Parliament.²⁵

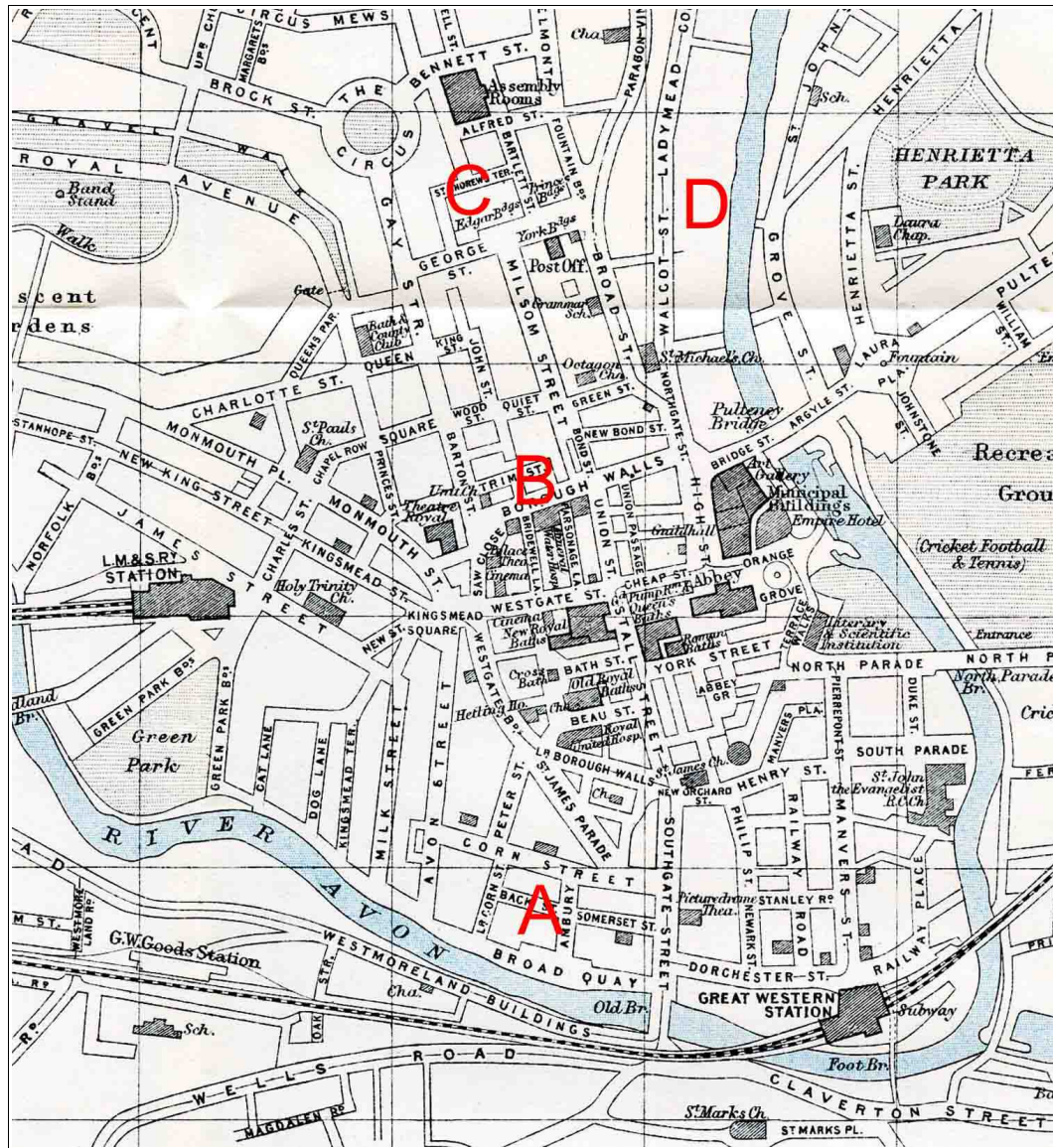


Figure 20: Central area map indicating locations of; (A) proposed riverside boulevard scheme 1925; (B) Proposed demolition of the Old Bond Street block and Mineral Water Hospital 1935; (C) Proposed demolition of Edgar Buildings and construction of piazza in front of the Assembly Rooms 1935; (D) Proposed site of Walcot Street bus station 1937 (Ward Lock Guide to Bath 1923 series with adaptations).

The Bill's victorious supporters accused the National Citizens Union of a 'selfish

sort of austerity' that departed from what *The Bath Chronicle* described as the city's founding principles of beautification, 'enterprise and civic patriotism'.²⁶ The Bill also had working class support, a letter from a resident of East Twerton described it as a 'workers opportunity' and highlighted that 'there has always been opposition to progressive measures' in Bath.²⁷ There had been reactionary opposition to the proposed adoption of gas street lighting in 1817 and, it was claimed that:

*It is the same spirit working today through the National Citizens Union, a spirit that if it had always prevailed, where now is beautiful Bath would have remained a swamp and Bladud's swine would still have been wallowing in its mire.*²⁸

Despite the passing of the Bill, development of the riverside boulevard was stalled. New retail premises were constructed at the corner of Southgate Street and Broad Quay in 1935 as part of the works enabled under the 1925 Act [figure 21],²⁹ however the decision to proceed with the project was not made until 1939 when the city engineer announced preparations to report on the necessary infrastructure requirements. At the same time the council was bracing itself for heavy expenditure on air raid precautions in the impending conflict that would ultimately cause the abandonment of the 1925 Improvement Bill's most ambitious and costly scheme.³⁰



Figure 21: The corner of Southgate street and Broad Quay, the first and only completed stage of the proposed riverside boulevard. Photograph 2012 (Robin Pakes).

The blight that the Avon Street slum placed on the city's image meant that no objections were raised concerning the proposed demolition of the notable examples of Georgian architecture located there. Some of these had been constructed in the 1730s but had long fallen into disrepair,³⁴ their importance outweighed by what was seen as a national moral 'crusade' to tackle the problem of slum housing.³⁵ With regard to the fate of these buildings it was observed that:

*The Old Medieval Builders were ruthless when dealing with their predecessors work and we must be the same when social progress demands, but we must confess to feeling a twinge when viewing much of the fine work of Georgian architects, to be found in many now unfashionable parts of Bath which the steam-tractor of modern progress will shortly drive through.*³⁶

When the 1925 Bath Act proposed improvements in areas where architectural significance was more readily perceived, opposition was more forthcoming. The proposed demolition of Chandos House to enable street widening at Westgate Buildings was a factor in the revival of the Old Bath Preservation Society in June 1929. At a special meeting it was stated that the products of the Act 'suggested the advisability of arousing the society's dormant activities'. Concerns were raised that 'Bath should not be spoiled through 'mistaken, if well meaning ideas of improvement', and in view of 'certain atrocities lately perpetrated in the principal streets the corporation be urged to enforce clause 128 of the by-laws relating to the elevation and reconstruction of frontages'.³⁷

Of particular concern was 'the importance of keeping shop fronts in harmony with the architecture of the street'.³⁸ In 1930 engineer, railway historian and Old Bath Preservation Society member J.G.H. Warren observed in a letter to the *Bath Chronicle* that 'the destructive hand of the utilitarian had descended' on Milsom Street, where a number of new shop fronts had been constructed. Technological culpability lay, he claimed, with the use of the steel girder that had enabled the construction of shop fronts that undermined the unity of the elevations that had formerly prevented the 'vulgar competition between individuals'.³⁹

The commercialism that Warren saw as anathema to the city's architectural dignity

would later be personified in the character of Harcourt “Ready Money” Nash in the 1937 Bath based novel *The Golden House* by author, local resident and Bath Preservation Trust subscriber and trustee, Horace Annesley Vachell.⁴⁰ Soon after taking up residence in the city, department store owner Nash unveiled his wide ranging civic improvement plans to Vachell's nobly born yet reduced circumstances Bathonian protagonist, Humphry Paganel, whose family seat in the city he had recently bought:

*Humphry, at first glance was swept off his feet by the audacity of a scheme so comprehensive in its scope. His eyes rested upon a superb drawing. He beheld a glorified Milsom Street with all the ugly buildings which made it a cul-de-sac wiped out. In their place was a Venetian Plaza, a great quadrangle with steps not unlike the magnificent stone staircase at Prior Park, with terraces with a fountain playing in the centre.*⁴¹

Vachell had drawn on the events of 1935 when a Parliamentary Bill was promoted by Alderman Alfred Wills proposing significant and widespread improvements in the city at an estimated cost of £1,000,000. The Bill reflected Wills' long term vision for Bath that he first had described a decade earlier as a 'dream of a City of beauty, of healthfulness and improved traffic facilities'.⁴² Wills claimed that the subsequent improvements conducted in the city under the 1925 Bath Corporation Act had caused him to 'dream a second time' resulting in a proposed scheme intended to make Bath a 'city without rival'.⁴³

The proposed improvements had two main objectives. The first was to rationalise traffic flow through the city. Concerns had been raised that the existing bypass arrangements that took traffic through Bathwick, Widcombe and the Lower Bristol Road prevented touring motorists from seeing 'the real Bath' and resulted in a loss of business.⁴⁴ The second was to address the imbalance of trade between Milsom Street and the lower town's Southgate area where a range of new commercial premises had been constructed.⁴⁵

Such was the extent of the proposal that over 600 city centre properties were scheduled for acquisition to enable the widespread demolition required. Its main

features were the demolition of the Old Bond Street block, the extension of Milsom Street and the removal of Edgar buildings to allow for the construction of a plaza providing a vista from the top of Union Street to the Assembly Rooms [figures 22, 23 and 24]. It also included the bilateral widening of Walcot Street and Broad Street, so threatening the latter's pre-Georgian buildings, and the demolition of Mineral Water Hospital constructed by John Wood the Elder in 1740,⁴⁶ with its services being moved to a new riverside facility.

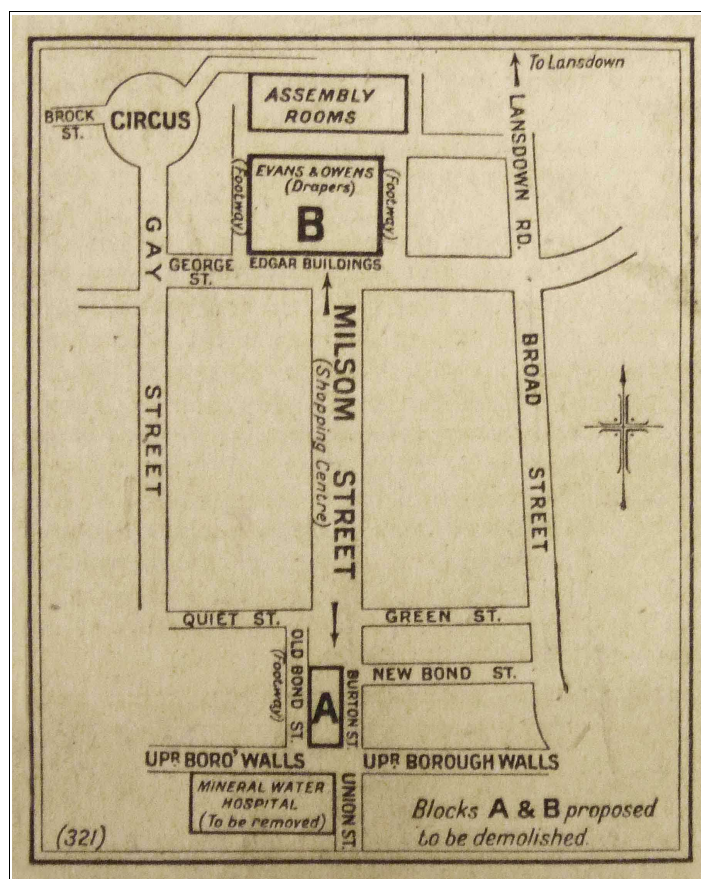
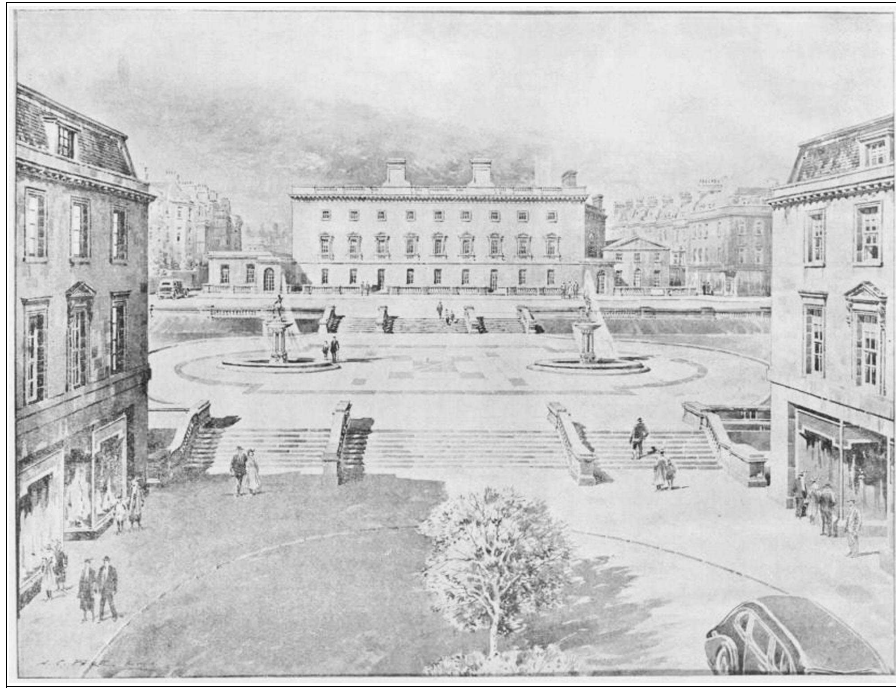
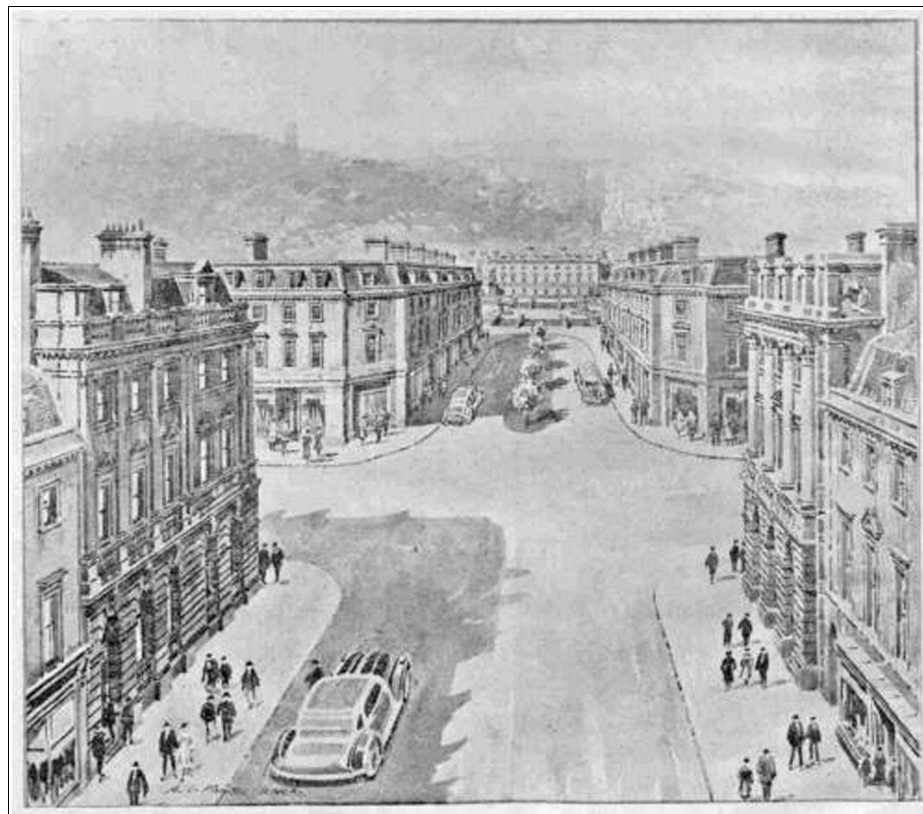


Figure 22: Map indicating the proposed demolition of the Old Bond Street block (A) and Edgar Buildings, The Times, 18 November 1935 (Press cutting, Bath Preservation Trust Archive).

The proposals sparked local and national controversy. The objectives of civic, commercial and technological progress were seen at odds with the loss of historic architecture in a city that was said to belong not to Bathonians and the city council, but to 'the whole English speaking world'.⁴⁷ It is also possible to discern a degree of editorial amusement at the conflict surrounding the urban archetype of provincial English gentility. The *Daily Sketch* described a 'clash' in which



*Figure 23: Impression of proposed piazza in front of the Assembly Rooms. Wash drawing by Arthur Cecil Fare, The Bath Chronicle, 26 October 1935 p.2
(© Local World Ltd. Image courtesy of British Library Board).*



*Figure 24: Impression of intended vista from Union Street to Assembly Rooms. Wash drawing by Arthur Cecil Fare, The Bath Chronicle, 26 October 1935 p.2
(© Local World Ltd. Image courtesy of British Library Board).*

'architects, antiquarians, modernists and motorists are mixed up in a controversy of glorious uncertainty',⁴⁸ whilst Vachell wrote in *The Telegraph* that 'an uncivil war' had broken out in 'The Queen City of the West'.⁴⁹

In an allusion to the *sventramenti* in Rome, *The Times* described the objection to the "pick-axe" methods of improvement' that threatened the Old Bond Street block.⁵⁰ This can be seen as more than a superficial remark. The development of Rome's Piazzale Augusto Imperatore, where the demolition of Baroque urban fabric to expose the Mausoleum of Augustus as the central feature in a proposed traffic hub, had been symbolically commenced a year earlier by a pickaxe-swinging Mussolini.⁵¹ Similarly the Bath scheme sought to open up urban space to traffic and expose and monumentalise an important historic building. Given the perceived and established links between the two cities,⁵² the developments in Rome arguably represented the only contemporary model comparable with Bath's municipal intent to reconcile its commercial and technological objectives with the expression of historic and civic identity.

Despite this, the politically determined planning seen in Fascist Rome was historically anathema to British political and economic culture which eschewed absolutism and was traditionally expressed through private speculation and piecemeal development.⁵³ Whilst these qualities informed the development of Bath's architectural set pieces, they were also expressed in the urban detail and historic character of the threatened Old Bond Street block. To consider such a building superfluous and to expose the Assembly Rooms as a monument was arguably a miscalculation of how Bath's historic built environment was valued and how its scale should be understood.

The creation of a vista from Union Street to the Assembly Rooms was criticised by Professor Charles H. Reilly of the Liverpool School of Architecture. The self-declared 'modernist in all respects except where Bath is concerned' objected to the 'proposed lengthening of Milsom Street with imitation eighteenth century buildings' and the demolition of 'genuine ones of considerable charm to expose the Assembly Rooms, never designed to command such a vista and quite unequal to the task'.⁵⁴ Reilly also argued that the creation of the 'pretentious plaza' in front

of them would also expose the backs of houses of the Circus bringing disunity to the 'most urbane and distinguished nucleus of Georgian architecture in the country'.⁵⁵

In contrast *The Bath Chronicle* expressed its favour of the scheme. It published drawings of the proposed developments and in an editorial supporting Wills' defence of the proposals against a raft of criticism, claimed that:

*It has already been complained that by the new Bill is contemplated the destruction of much of the eighteenth century architecture of Bath. So far from that being correct we discern in the plans the intent to make Bath more than ever Georgian in appearance.*⁵⁶

The intersection of tradition and modernity in the proposals is evident in the use of selected buildings as historic reference points that are reinterpreted in the form of new construction intended to make the city fit for future purposes. The display of the Assembly Rooms as the focal point of the scheme, along with proposals for the municipal purchase and restoration of Pulteney Bridge and other historically significant buildings (a measure that won the approval of the Bath Preservation Trust),⁵⁷ can be seen as a desire promote a spirit of historic continuity with the architectural, social and civic values they were perceived to embody. These could be set against undesirable expressions of modernity in a future seen as open to human agency. Such buildings would therefore inform the expression of progress and act as moral exemplars in the promotion of the historically significant socio-political notion that human societies pursue a developmental trajectory towards higher forms of organisation.⁵⁸

These sentiments can be discerned in a speech given by Alderman Wills in favour of presenting the 1935 Bill before Parliament with the claim that Bath could be replanned so that:

it would have no rival in the British Isles; and that this [...] would enable the city to take such a step forward that there would be no limit to its possibilities [...] The city must either go backwards or forwards. If you have the courage to vote for this

*today, I honestly believe that future generations will bless you for having done so.*⁵⁹

The scheme was also seen as important in terms of job creation and the controversy highlighted a conflict of interests between what was felt to be socio-economic necessity and the preservation of architectural and cultural value. With its promise of employment, progress and prosperity the scheme offered hope to the city's working classes and was fully supported by the its Trades and Labour Council. A poignant view of its perceived importance and the social economic divides it highlighted is seen in a letter to the *Bath Chronicle and Herald*, signed simply, 'WORKING MAN':

*At the moment one of city fathers is trying to put through a large scheme which will make work for many hundreds of unemployed, besides bringing money to the town, providing food and warmth for our women folk and little children. But for the sake of the few who, I have little doubt, are secure and have not the terror of hunger and unemployment hanging over them they would pit man against crumbling houses.*⁶⁰

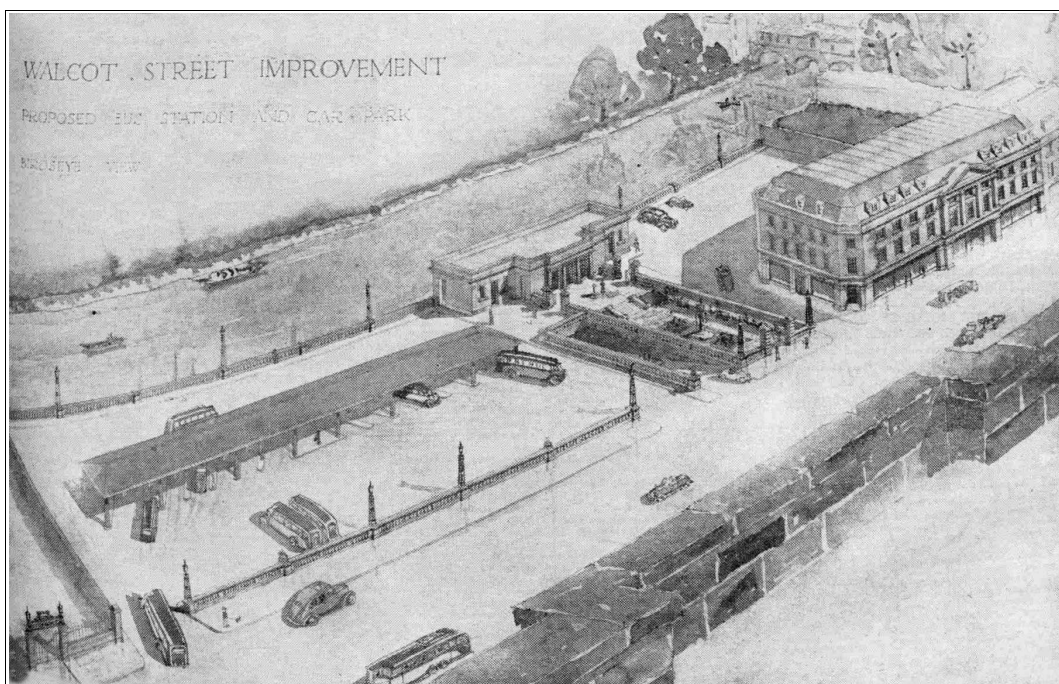
In this view, architectural preservation is aligned with opposition to social progress, and given the criticism levelled against the National Citizens Union a decade earlier, would appear to be an enduring feature of class division in the city during the interwar period. A contrasting view is seemingly alluded to in a review of the *The Golden House* published in *The Bath Chronicle* in September 1937 which observed that a comment made by Vachell's character Humphry Paganel after joining the Bath Preservation Trust was actually expression of the novelist's own beliefs.⁶¹

*There are progressives in this ancient city who would pull down the Royal Crescent and turn it into an aerodrome if that gave work to the unemployed [...] They consider themselves and their own interests.*⁶²

The extent of municipal investment in the million pound scheme, the anticipated costs to ratepayers and disruption to residents and businesses had prompted

serious concerns that Wills' dream would become an ongoing financial and urban nightmare.⁶³ This view was compounded by the additional expenses incurred by the 1925 Act when less than half of its proposed improvements had been implemented. Although the council voted in favour of presenting the Bill before Parliament in October 1935, financial caution prevailed and the motion was defeated when ratepayers voted against it on 30th December 1935.⁶⁴

Despite its defeat, the Bath Preservation Trust observed that as part of the Bill 'powers were sought that would have enabled the Council more effectively to deal with the preservation of 18th Century buildings'.⁶⁵ These were precursors to the clauses included in the 1937 Bath Act which enabled the scheduling of selected historic buildings that formed a foundation to the legal framework of the conservation movement of the post war era. The Bath Preservation Trust later noted that the 1937 Act, which included a proposal to build a bus station and car park to replace Walcot Street's decaying riverside yards [figure 25], contained 'nothing [that] would destroy or mutilate any buildings of historical merit' and was



*Figure 25: Impression of proposed Walcot Street bus station and car park. Wash drawing by Frank P. Sissons, The Bath Chronicle, 31 October 1936 p.15
(© Local World Ltd. Image courtesy of British Library Board).*

developed in a 'spirit of cordial collaboration'. Consequently it was approved by a large majority of voters,⁶⁶ yet like the unrealised riverside boulevard, the bus station development was postponed indefinitely at the outbreak of war.

The improvement schemes explored in this chapter were indicative of an ambitious optimism with regard to civic improvement, social progress and economic development. In each case, political and financial practicalities along with the developing understanding of significance of Bath's Georgian architecture precluded their realisation and the city was spared the large scale demolition that would have been required. Whilst Atkinson's 1916 scheme was planned so that 'the least damage would be done in the way of the destruction of fine buildings' and the demolition required by the boulevard development seen as a progressive necessity,⁶⁷ that of the 1935 scheme struck at the core of the city's Georgian identity. In the aftermath of the Luftwaffe's bombardment of April 1942, it was observed that had it been in progress at the outbreak of war, the existing scene of 'devastation' would have been added to by enemy action.⁶⁸ This raises the possibility that a far greater degree of modernist reconstruction would have been enabled and hastened in Bath in the post war era, as it was in other British cities, than that which was proposed and implemented and subsequently understood as an erroneous chapter in the city's twentieth century development.⁶⁹

Chapter Four

Social and Technological Change and New Forms of Consumption and Entertainment.

I feel it true to say that this is a cinema of which Bath will be proud [...] We want to see Bath at the forefront, I think that I may say that Bath possesses a perfect example of architecture in this cinema.

Col. The Honorable H.S. Davey, Mayor of Bath, 19th May 1934.¹

In August 1933 the *Bath Chronicle* published a full page feature titled 'A Modern Transformation Scene'.² An octet of photographs and accompanying text depicted and described the array of new commercial premises under construction and adaptation in and around the city's Southgate area [figure 26]. The disruption to trade caused by the demolition and building work meant that the annual retail festival and window dressing competition known as Display Week had been cancelled and the area was said to be 'more like a shelled city in France than a spa in England'.³ Rising from this image of destruction was a range of buildings that drew on the city's architectural traditions and expressed modernity through new construction technologies, striking interiors and functions indicative of new forms of consumption and entertainment.

The feature's most prominent building, and the only one yet completed, was the new headquarters and showrooms of the Bath Corporation Electricity Department. Designed by W.A. Williams, it was constructed on the former site of the Full Moon Hotel and the adjacent Electric Light Station in Dorchester Street.⁴ In another feature published after its opening in October 1933, the building with its rounded quadrant elevation, engaged giant order Doric columns, pilasters and banded rustication,⁵ was described as a 'splendid example of modern architecture in the old tradition'.⁶ Moreover, its interior was described as 'modernity in excelsis', incorporating an electric lift and an array of up to date decorative design features along with 'empire wood' panelling [figures 27 to 34].⁷

LEAVING ST. PETER'S CHURCH



Mr. J. Court and his bride, Miss May Parratt.

A MODERN TRANSFORMATION SCENE.

Here is an instructive octet of pictures giving an idea in pictorial form of the process of transformation, either complete or in process of evolution, which the pedestrian may encounter during a stroll through the city from the Old Bridge to the top of Milnes Street. Our starting point—top right—is the Old Bridge (with the railway viaduct in the background). From here we go to the new show-rooms for the Bath Corporation Electricity Department (No. 1), in their dignified architecture, which occupy the site of the old Full Moon Hotel. Crossing the bottom of Southgate Street, we pause to look at the two vacant houses at the corner of the Broad Quay (No. 2) which—some day—may be demolished to enable the fine new riverside boulevard to be laid out. This point to the L.M.S. station to be constructed. On our way up Southgate Street, we turn along Somerset Street, and pause for a third time to marvel at the steel skeleton of the new cinema (No. 3) which has been provisionally agreed by the Bath Corporation. We next arrive at the corner of Corn Street, where for many years the corner house was occupied by the Bath Corporation Post Office (No. 4). Our fifth scene has transported us to the intersection by St. James's Church of Southgate Street, Stall Street, New Orchard Street, and the Lower Borough Walls. Here we see how satisfactorily the demolition of the upper portions of the three business premises at the top of the east side of Southgate Street has progressed. Continuing our upward progress, we stop to admire the fresh appearance of the masonry of the new building on the east side of Stall Street for a new store (No. 6). Still climbing, we make our way into Union Street, and cross the road to look at the premises of Messrs. James Colmer (Ld.) (No. 7), where transformation of an old-established business to a modern store is steadily proceeding. Finally, having commenced at the home of electricity, we end our tour at the new headquarters of Bath's gas industry—the showrooms in Old Bond Street (No. 8) for the Bath Gas Company.

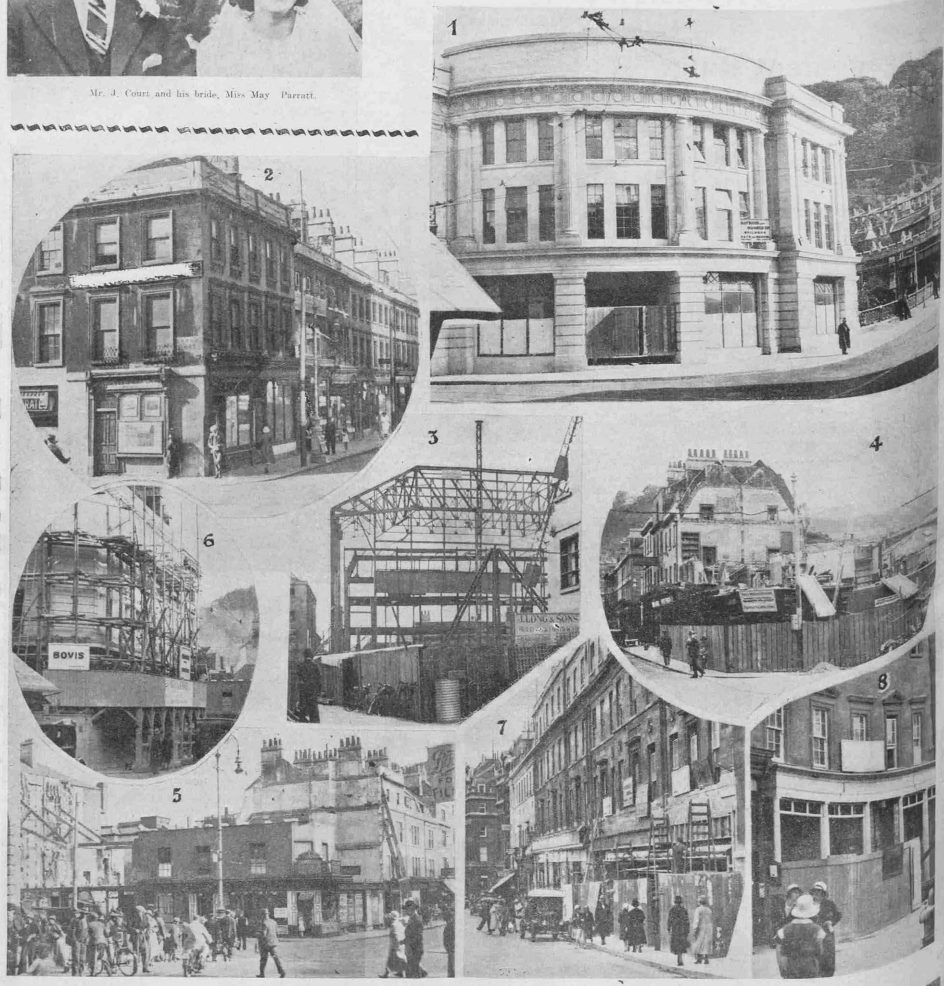


Figure 26: "A Modern Transformation Scene". Press feature outlining the raft of changes in the city centre in August 1933 including; (1) the new Bath Corporation Electricity Department showroom and headquarters; (2) the corner of Broad Quay 'which - some day - may be demolished to make way for the fine riverside boulevard'; (3) the steel frame of the Forum cinema; (4) demolition at the corner of Corn Street; (5) demolition at the intersection of Southgate Street, Stall Street, New Orchard Street and Lower Borough Walls; (6) construction of a new department store in Stall Street; (7) refurbishment and refitting of shops in Union Street and; (8) new showrooms and headquarters for the Bath Gas Company in Old Bond Street. The Bath Chronicle, 26 August 1933 p.24
(© Local World Ltd. Image courtesy of British Library Board).

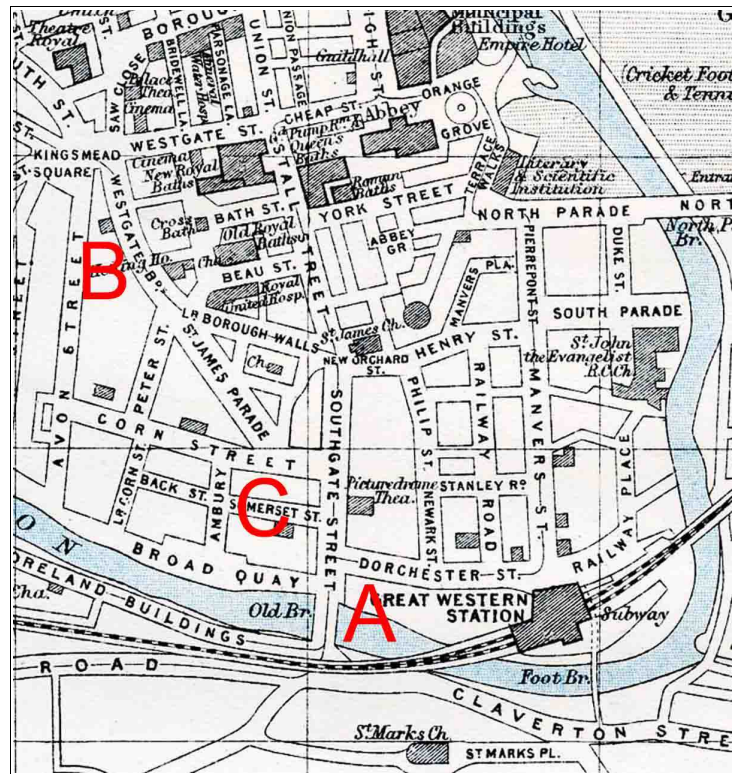


Figure 27: Central area map section indicating locations of; (A) the Bath Corporation Electricity Department and showrooms; (B) the Bath Co-operative Society headquarters and department Store; (C) the Forum cinema (Ward Lock Guide to Bath 1923 series with adaptations).



Figure 28: The replacement of the Full Moon Hotel by the Bath Corporation Electricity Department and showrooms, described as 'A Splendid example of modern architecture in the old tradition'. The Bath Chronicle, 28 October 1933 p.8 (© Local World Ltd. Image courtesy of British Library Board).

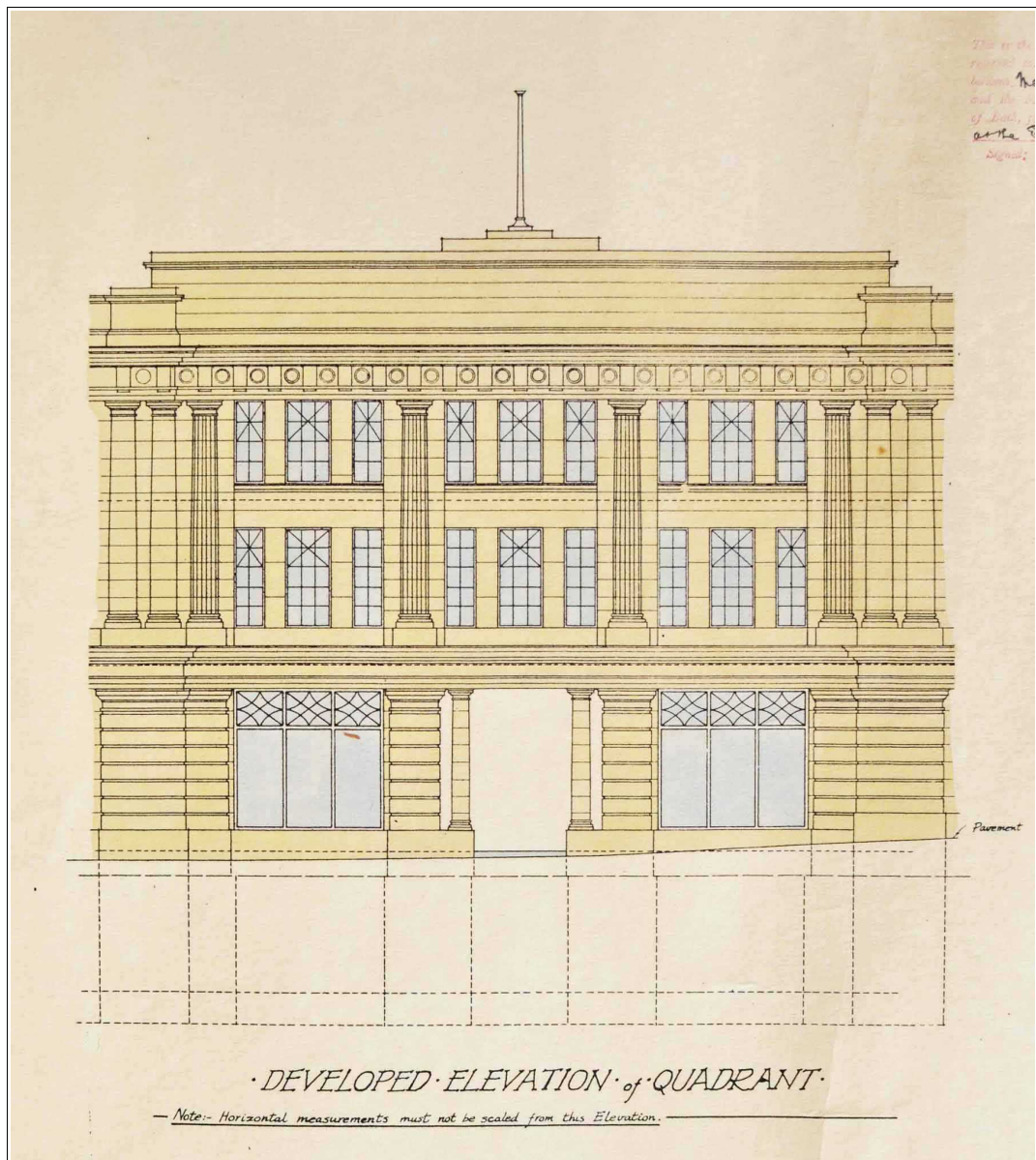


Figure 29: Bath Corporation Electricity Department and showrooms by W.A. Williams, 1931. 'Developed Elevation of Quadrant' drawing indicating modern interpretation of classical traditions (Bath Record Office).

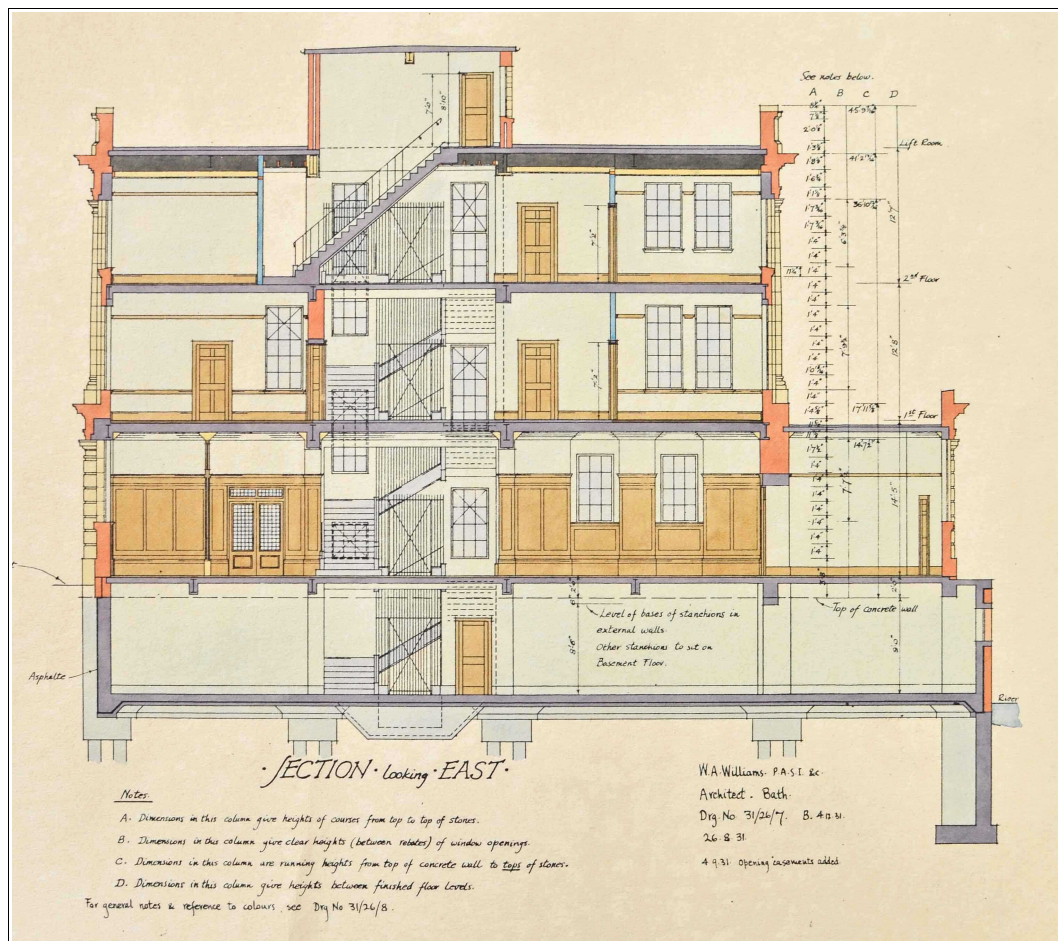


Figure 30: Bath Corporation Electricity Department and showrooms. Section drawing indicating internal structure, wood panelling, lift and concrete lined waterproof basement (Bath Record Office).



Figure 31: Bath Corporation Electricity Department. Directional motifs in floor patterning. Photograph 2007 (Bath Heritage Watchdog).

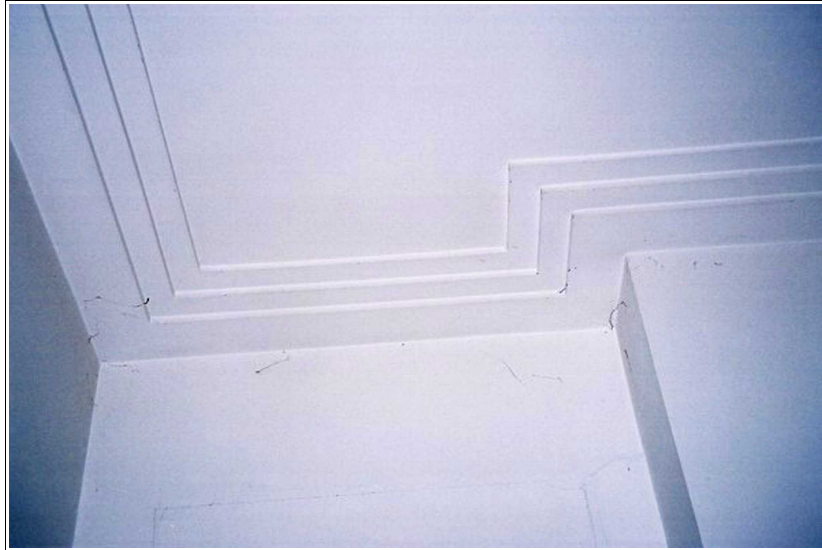


Figure 32: Bath Corporation Electricity Department. Stepped ceiling plasterwork. Photograph 2007 (Bath Heritage Watchdog)



Figure 33: Bath Corporation Electricity Department. Chequer inlaid steps and contemporary styled newel and landing metalwork.

Photograph 2007 (Bath Heritage Watchdog).



Figure 34: Bath Corporation Electricity Department. 'Empire wood' panelling with fluted detail. Photograph 2007 (Bath Heritage Watchdog).

The building (that was demolished in 2007) formed a highly visible representation of municipally led civic progress and represented a 'trend in favour of municipal trading for all public utility services'.⁸ In addition it housed the city's generating plant, thus combining electrical technology with the city's architectural identity in an assertion of modernity over the privately owned Bath Gas Company. Despite 'record sales' and the fitting of 'palatial new showrooms' opened in Old Bond Street in January 1934,⁹ the Bath Gas Company's sprawling coal fired riverside works recalled the city's nineteenth century industrialism. In a period of optimism regarding the possibilities of electricity, such commercial and technological considerations arguably informed the council's decision to end its contract with the company in 1933 and power all of Bath's street lighting by electricity instead.¹⁰

The privately owned Bath Electric Light Company had been a pioneer in the development of electric street lighting and the city's first system had been switched on in June 1890.¹¹ The transition to public ownership in 1897 required the council to provide a system that could be extended to the whole city and the 1925 Bath Corporation Act enabled the council to further develop its underground cable network and construct new showrooms.¹² These factors promoted Bath's city council as technologically progressive, a view consolidated in 1928 when the city

had hosted a thousand delegates at the Convention of the Incorporated Municipal Electrical Association. The event's finale involved the experimental flood lighting of Pulteney Bridge and the Abbey by the city's chief electrical engineer E.J. Spark,¹³ three years ahead of the flood lighting displays held at the 1931 International Illumination Congress in London.¹⁴

In a reflection of a national marketing campaign sponsored by the Electrical Development Association,¹⁵ an 'Electric House' was opened in February 1927 to advertise the benefits of domestic electrical installation. The single storey Victorian house in Marlborough Lane near the Royal Crescent was wired for the occasion and demonstrated full electric lighting and appliances including an electric fire, toaster, kettle and coffee percolator.¹⁶ A subsequent reduction in generating costs made electricity more affordable and in April 1932 an 'all electric bungalow' was opened in suburban Bathampton. On display were coal effect electric fires, electric clocks controlled from the electricity works and the latest 'Labour Saving Wonders' including an electric egg beater and cake mixer, and even an 'electric health machine'.¹⁷

This newly built dwelling and its appliances were significant of Britain's rapidly expanding housing market and reflected a broader range of aspirational social mobility than its retrofitted predecessor. Yet both were indicative of a growing awareness of 'the servant problem' that saw a decline in the numbers of young women entering domestic service during the interwar period.¹⁸ In Bath this was understood in terms of an unwillingness to work in 'old type houses' due to their difficult working conditions, changes in status attitudes among 'modern girls' and the better pay and hours provided by other forms of employment.¹⁹

This produced a requirement for greater efficiency in the homes of the upper middle classes experiencing staff shortages and the new lower middle classes whose finances were constrained by mortgages, increased transportation costs associated with suburban settlement and hire purchase payments. This led to what Deborah Sugg Ryan describes as the increasingly 'professionalised' role of the housewife and an emphasis on scientific and technological methods of domestic management.²⁰

In Bath, these developments were reflected in a programme of lectures with titles such as *Electrical Aids to Domestic Artistry* held at the new electricity showrooms by the city's branch of the Electrical Association for Women.²¹ This national movement was formed in 1924 with the intention of promoting a 'modern vision' of domestic life through the use of new labour saving appliances and to educate the electrical industry and appliance manufacturers about the requirements and aspirations of domestic consumers.²²

The new showrooms and the electrical goods displayed there also formed part of wider developments in approaches to retail display and patterns of consumption. In a speech made at their opening Harry Hatt, chairman of the council's Electricity Committee, looked forward to a future signified by the 'decorative and artistic phases' of electrical retail lighting effects, for which a display area had been specifically designed.²³

Such developments in retail presentation can be seen in relation to an increase in consumer demand based on the expanding suburban housing market and associated social mobility. Peter Scott states that a national survey of working class household expenditure conducted from October 1937 to July 1938 indicated that 17.8 per cent of non-agricultural working class homes were owned outright or mortgaged, more than double the figure seen in 1931.²⁴ House purchase was enabled by the increased availability of mortgages, which in Bath in 1935 were offered by the Co-operative Permanent Building Society at a reduced rate of 4.5 per cent.²⁵ In addition to a mortgage, home-owners faced the costs of household furnishings and appliances. These had been bought into the financial reach of the lower middle classes through the increased availability of hire purchase agreements and the furniture industry's emergent use of mass production to meet increased levels of demand.²⁶

Scott demonstrates that these new patterns of consumption in combination with cultural changes associated with social mobility, such as a shift in notions of respectability in relation to family size, precipitated a reduction in the fertility rates among working and lower middle class families.²⁷ Interwar Bath saw the construction of 2438 private houses that along with the construction of 1804

council houses increased the city's overall size by almost a third.²⁸ Yet at the same time the city's population was in gradual decline falling by 430 between 1935 and 1936 to 67,770, with approximate decreases of 300, 400 and 160 in the years prior to that.²⁹ The equation between the city's increasing housing stock and dwindling population was described as 'something of a paradox'.³⁰ This appeared to be linked to new patterns of consumption in the local observation that:

*The population has not increased and there are fewer children in the schools. Has the purchasing power of the community increased or has money been diverted from other channels?*³¹

At the new Co-operative Wholesale Society headquarters and department store that was designed L.G. Elkins and opened in Westgate Buildings on 14th April 1934,³² the furnishing department took up the entire first floor. Described soon after as the city's 'most modern store',³³ it represented a new form of consumption for a new class of consumers through its 'modern method of trading' in which profits were shared with customers who were members 'in proportion to their purchases'.³⁴

The purpose built department store replaced the Georgian buildings that had previously stood on the site. At its official opening it was praised as a 'very pleasing addition to [Bath's] civic architecture', its neo-classical facade incorporating 'giant fluted Ionic pilasters',³⁵ a roof level balustrade and a pediment containing a relief of the city's heraldic shield. Such was the occasion that a 'strong contingent of police' was required to manage traffic and control the crowd of spectators gathered to hear the speeches made from a specially erected platform in the store's entrance and broadcast by radio to nearby Kingsmead Square [figures 35, 36 and 37].³⁶

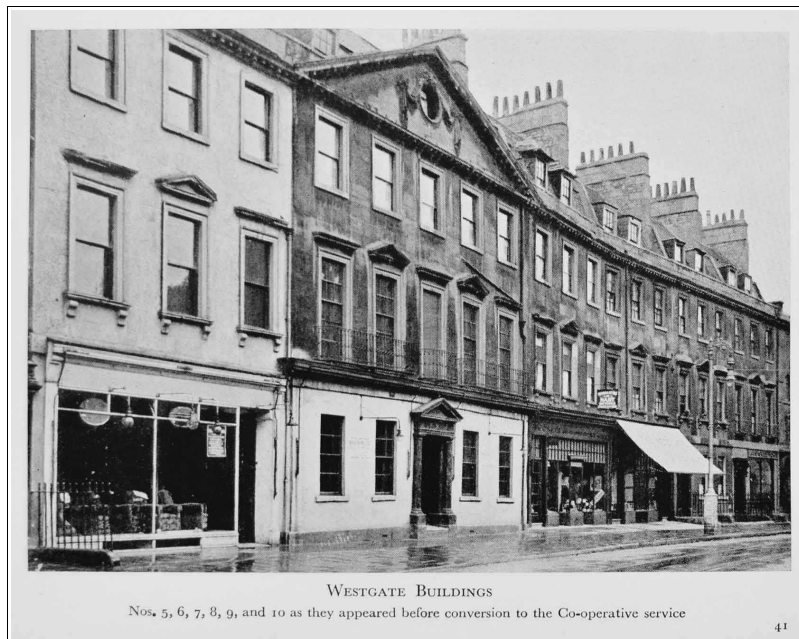


Figure 35: Westgate Buildings before the construction of the Co-operative Wholesale Society headquarters and department Store. Photograph featured in W.H.Brown, Bath Society – In Co-operation: The Jubilee History of the Bath Co-operative Society Ltd, 1939 (Bath Co-operative Society Limited).



Figure 36: Co-operative Society department store and headquarters. Photograph c.1937 (Bath Central Library/Bath in Time).

The design of the new department store can be interpreted as an expression of the Co-operative Movement's growing membership and confidence in Bath. This followed what Borsay describes as opposition to its perceived proletarian

challenge to the expression and celebration the city's dominant middle class identity.³⁷ In 1927 an application by the Twerton Co-operative Society to erect a plaque like those seen elsewhere in Bath to the memory of Edward Vansittart Neale (one of the movement's founders) outside his birthplace in the Royal Crescent was declined by the Mural Tablet Committee and the property's owner who was 'not too favourably disposed towards co-operation'.³⁸ In January 1933 co-operators attending the Bath Co-operative Society Festival were reminded that the Movement was 'more than a mere shop, for it possesses possibilities for vast social reconstruction, representing nothing less than a social revolution of the first importance'.³⁹

Bath's Co-operative Society expanded rapidly after its department store opened. By March 1935 membership had grown to 14,769, more than twenty one per cent of the city's population and a figure significantly greater than the Society's national membership that amounted to 13.5 per cent of total population according to the last available figures produced in 1932.⁴¹ Sales had also risen and included a 92.1 per cent increase in furniture, drapery, outfitting and footwear during the same period raising concerns about competition among city centre traders.⁴² It might appear that the Co-operative Society's ongoing commercial expansion was anticipated in the space for the future extension of its first floor indicated on the architect's plans [figure 38].

Apart from the profit sharing benefits offered to members, the department store's competitive edge in the city can be assessed in terms its high specification retail environment. The architect's plans indicate Australian walnut panelling, oak flooring and glazed internal doors. Yet the store's most notable feature was arguably its polished black granite shop front. This incorporated bronze window frames and concertina gates that led to an arcade that trebled its display capacity and from which the store's interior could be entered via glazed mahogany doors. The arcade appears indicative of an awareness of what Peter Scott and James Walker see as the contemporary superiority of the shop window over other forms of promotion in terms of display to sales ratio,⁴³ this seemingly reflected in the Bath Co-operative Society's infrequent use of display advertising in the local press [figures 39, 40, and 41].

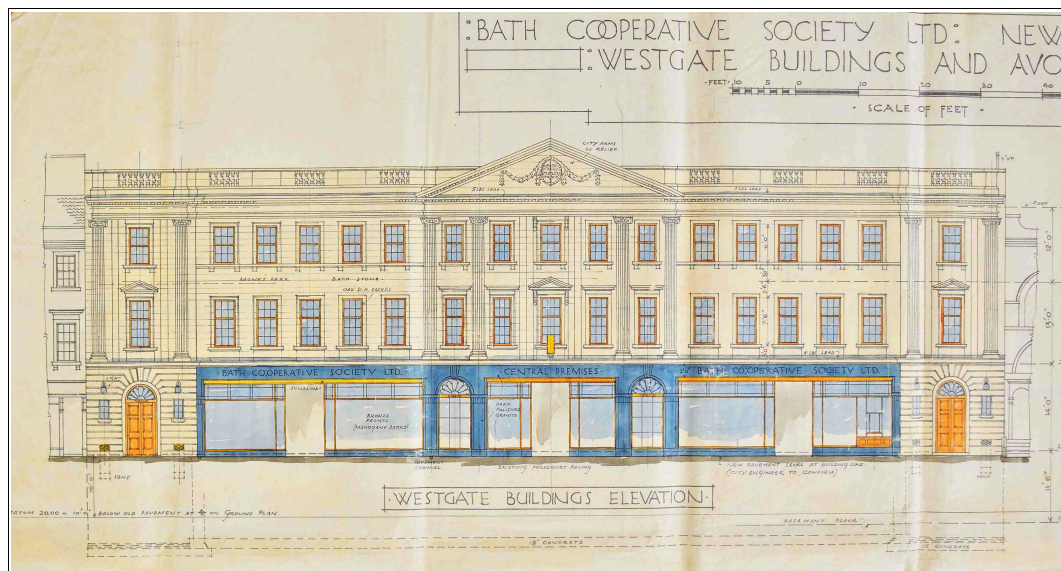


Figure 37: Co-operative Society department store and headquarters by L.G Elkins, 1932. Elevation drawing indicating polished black granite shop front, (Bath Record Office).

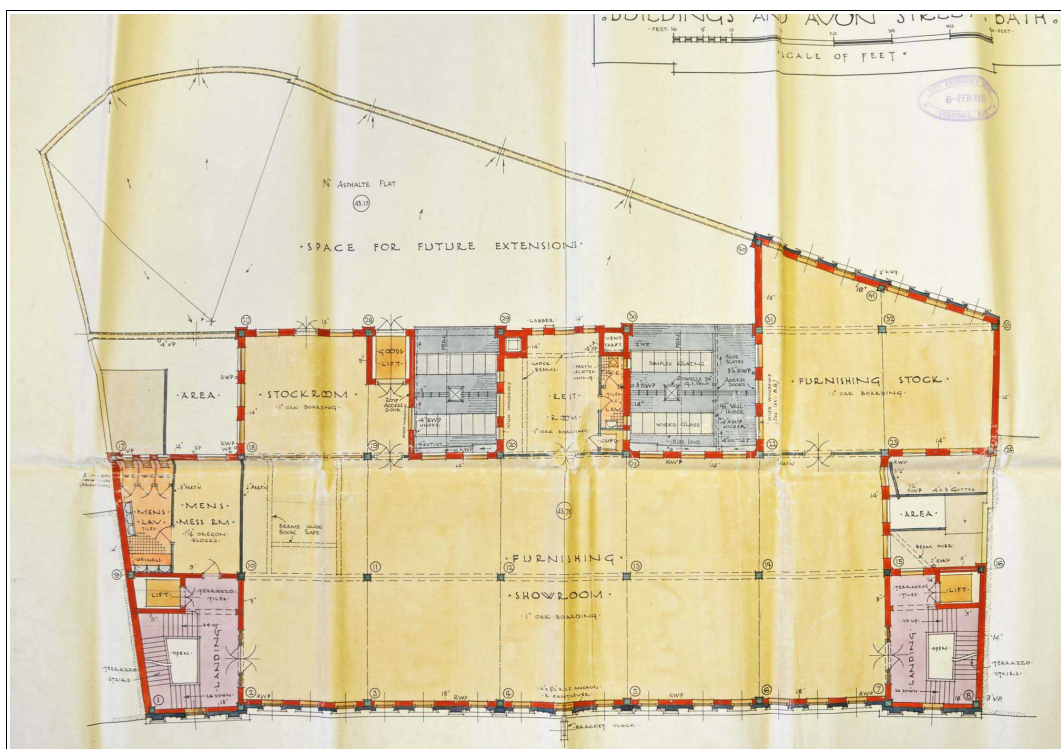


Figure 38: Co-operative Society department store and headquarters. Plan drawing of first floor furniture showroom indicating 'space for future extension', 1932 (Bath Record Office).

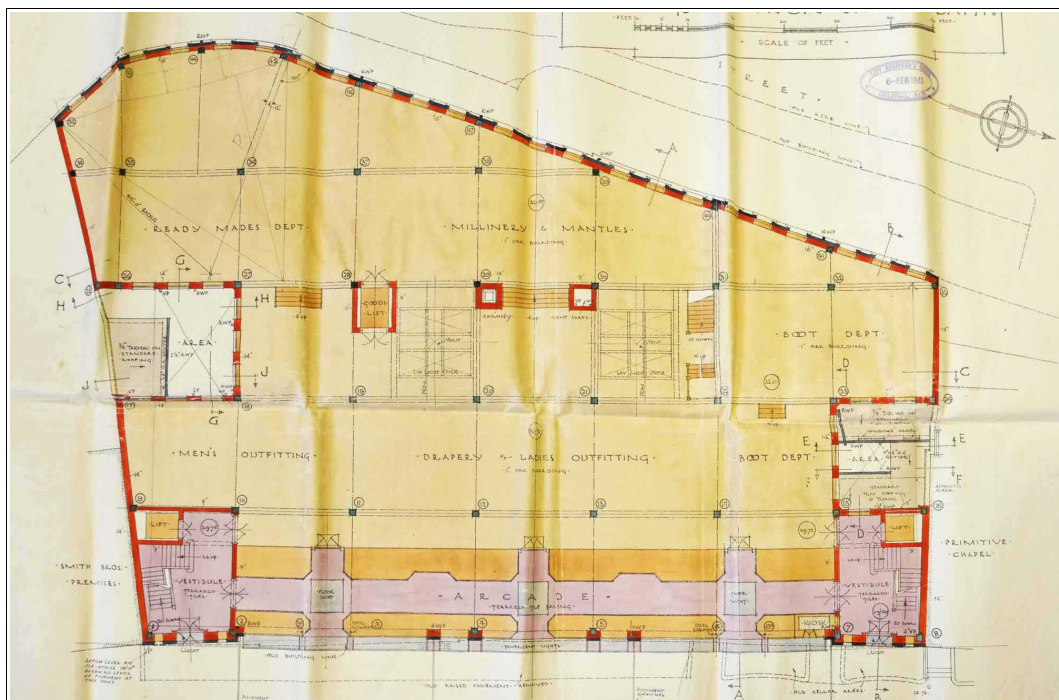
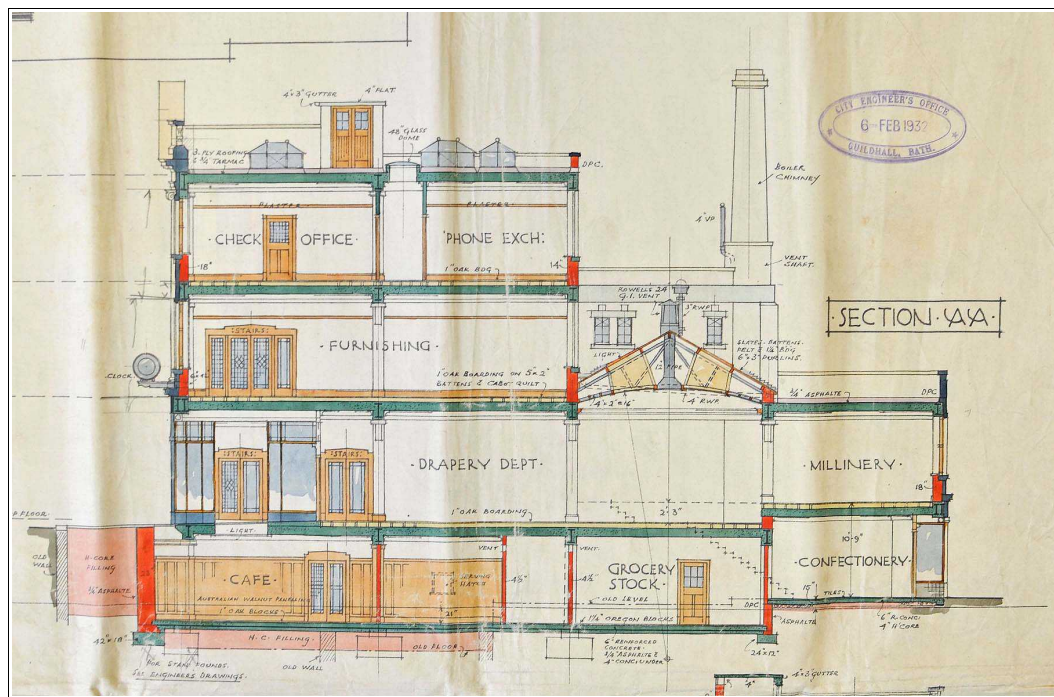




Figure 41: The shop front arcade at the Bath Co-operative Society Department Store featuring electrical display lighting. Photograph featured in W.H.Brown, Bath Society – In Co-operation: The Jubilee History of the Bath Co-operative, 1939 (Bath Co-operative Society Limited).

Combined with new retail lighting effects, the arcade can be seen in terms of developments in visual consumption. These were supported by the invitation to 'walk around and inspect the goods' without obligation to purchase.⁴⁴ In a reflection of a national trend and in combination with in-store facilities such as a café, this promoted the store's role as a recreational and social venue. In 1938 the

director of Harrods noted that department stores like Woolworths and Marks and Spencers, (both of whom had branches in Bath) had:

*become a kind of social centre [...] Visiting them is to many a form of inexpensive recreation, a mild excitement, and has become to countless thousands a favourite way to spend time and money.*⁴⁵

The visual consumption and recreational value associated with department stores exhibited what Fiona Anne Seaton describes as a culture of restraint that 'embodied balanced and measured progress, and was made wholesome by the exclusion of excess'.⁴⁶ In contrast to what might be seen as the mild diversion of the department store experience, the cinema provided a far greater scope for escapism and provided a compelling and increasingly global view of the modern world. These qualities were also expressed through the architectural development of the cinema building that Jeffrey Richards describes as 'the twentieth century's distinctive contribution to building types', equal to that of the railway station in the century before.⁴⁷ Writing in 1930, architectural critic and journalist Philip Morton Shand described the relevance of this new 'architecture of pleasure':

*The cinema, whether taciturn or chattersome, fills a need in our lives which no preceding age has ever felt [...] It is as one with the socially go-as-you-please age we live in: a symbol and a symptom of it.*⁴⁸

On May 19th 1934 Lord Bath opened the Forum cinema in the city's redeveloping Southgate area [figures 27 and 42].⁴⁹ Its developers, the Avon Cinema Company had commissioned the Bristol based cinema architect William Henry Watkins whose practice designed more than twenty cinemas in the south west of England during the interwar period. From the late 1920s Watkins delegated the design work to his assistants. The Forum's overall layout was designed by Cyril Smith and Curno Cooke and its exterior elevations were designed by Alexander Stuart Gray.⁵⁰



Figure 42: The Forum cinema by Alexander Stuart Gray, 1933-34. Photograph 2012 (Robin Pakes).

The '£75,000 super-cinema', was seen as the most significant building in Bath's ongoing programme of improvements,⁵¹ its estimated construction cost more than twice that of an 'average' Odeon cinema at the time.⁵² With seating for more than two thousand,⁵³ a figure far in excess of the city's other cinemas, the Forum like other 'super cinemas' of the period epitomised the rise of mass cinematic entertainment and thus formed a primary experiential locus of modernity.

Designed in 'deference to the *genius loci*' it was described by the Mayor at its inaugural luncheon as 'a perfect example of architecture'.⁵⁴ Constructed on almost the entirety of a single urban block, its Bath stone clad exterior covered a vast steel frame supported by 180 reinforced concrete piles that provided a fan shaped auditorium reported to be '100ft long by 100 ft wide tapering to 50ft at the proscenium and 50ft from floor to ceiling' with a partly cantilevered balcony, its rear wall 130 feet from the stage.⁵⁵ Although not Bath's first steel framed structure, its scale provided a newsworthy spectacle, the winching of an 18 ton girder seventy feet into the air to form part of the auditorium's structural span described as 'a heroic contest of man against nature' [figure 43].⁵⁶



Figure 43: Demolition to enable street works and the construction of the Forum's steel frame adjoining that of the new Membury and Sons warehouse at the rear. Photograph 1933 (Bath Central Library/Bath in Time).

Construction was accompanied by an extension of St James Parade, linking it with Southgate Street to create an important thoroughfare through 'a district formerly occupied by slum property'.⁵⁷ Council records indicate that the architect's original intention was to render the Forum's largely blank southern elevation in the somewhat insalubrious Somerset Street in snowcrete.⁵⁸ This durable portland cement that contains a white pigment which can be polished had been used to render the exterior of the Hoover Factory in Perivale that was designed by Wallis, Gilbert and Partners and completed in 1932.⁵⁹ However its use on Bath's Forum cinema was vetoed by the council with subsequent building approval based on the developer's agreement to use Bath Stone.⁶⁰ A colour wash drawing of the cinema produced in 1933 by Alexander Stuart Gray (whose depiction of Somerset Street was rather more up-market than in reality) indicates the additional intention to use snowcrete on the ground storey of the newly extended St James Parade where the cinema building incorporated five shop fronts [figures 44 and 45].

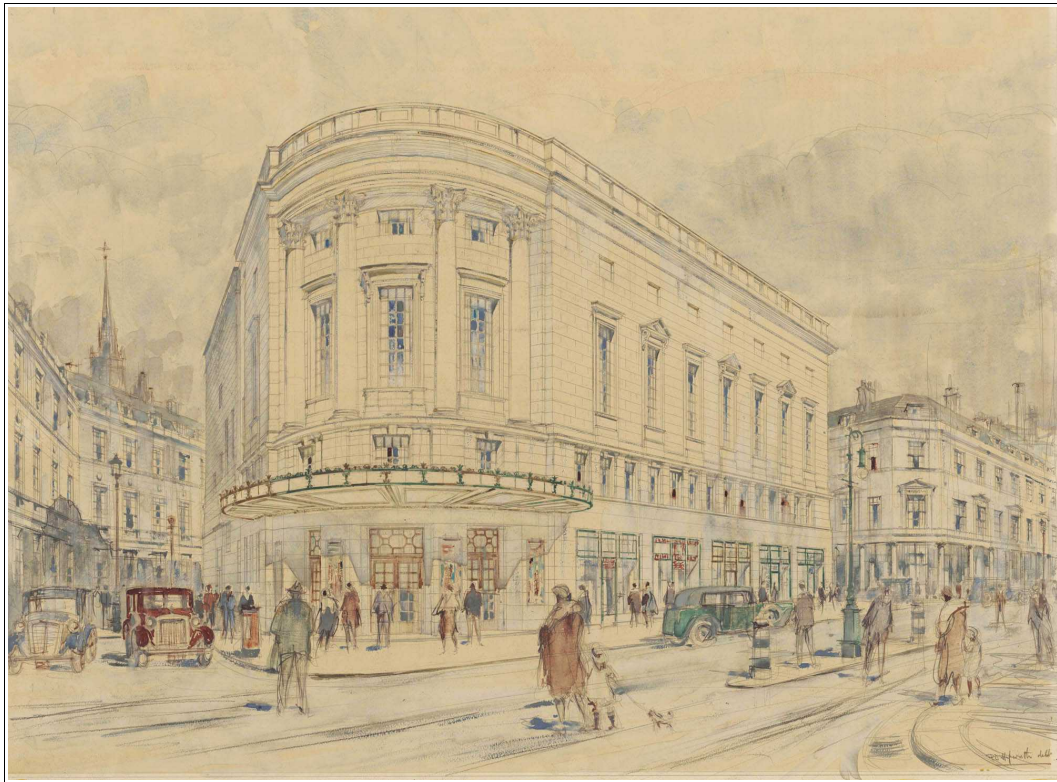


Figure 44: The Forum cinema. Colour wash drawing by Alexander Stuart Gray indicating snowcrete rendering on ground storey and Somerset Street elevation and fictional depiction of adjacent built environment, c.1933 (RIBA/Sackler Centre).



Figure 45: Bath stone clad elevation of Somerset street and adjacent warehouse and commercial premises. Photograph c.1937 (Bath Central Library/Bath in Time).

Such material contrast in a section of the building where retail and public spaces engaged was arguably indicative of the shop window's contemporary importance in relation to potential sales as seen at the Co-operative building. However, in contrast to this precursor where a contrasting material that was non-local yet traditional in a broad sense was used, the self consciously modern snowcrete arguably undermined the deference expressed elsewhere on the cinema's elevations and which readily conformed to the tenets of local aesthetic control.

Inside, the Forum's auditorium was constructed to 'ensure perfect acoustic properties' and incorporated a plenum ventilation system with 'all the latest modern improvements such as air washing to purify the air as it enters the theatre'.⁶¹ These were important features given the size of the balcony, the area under which audiences in other cinemas were often reluctant to sit due to problems with sound, poor ventilation and smoke in a period of widespread tobacco use.⁶² The Forum also contained a large 'up to date restaurant' also used as a ballroom for dances and functions.⁶³ Richards sees such facilities as indicative of the contemporary development of cinemas as socially respectable entertainment centres that reflected an increase in middle class patronage and a shift away their former flea-pit image.⁶⁴

The Forum's intended demographic was also reflected in its name that suggested 'an air of permanence and respectability'.⁶⁵ It is possible that it was chosen, in preference to the originally proposed 'Plaza' and later 'Avon Cinema',⁶⁶ with contemporary notions of civic parentage in mind. However the auditorium's 'prevailing decorative scheme' looked to Hellenic rather than Roman motifs,⁶⁷ whilst the 'picture frame' proscenium was topped with the city's heraldic crest, elements of which were also seen in decorative bosses on the balcony parapet and implied in the corner panels of the moulded frame surrounding the ceiling's vast sunburst decoration [figure 46].⁶⁸



Figure 46: The Forum's decorative scheme including frieze, plasterwork, ventilation grilles, lanterns, ceiling burst, and pinned seating upholstery.

Photograph c.1934, Picture House, Summer 1984, p.18

(Cinema Theatre Association).

The Forum's exterior was constructed to harmonise with the surrounding built environment and arguably served to mitigate the impact of its exuberant interior.⁶⁹ Yet, whilst it contained the latest technological features, both the interior and exterior were out of keeping with emerging thought on cinema design. In 1935 cinema architect Julian R. Leathart wrote that:

The Cinema, is indeed, one of the many notable phenomena of modern life, and it is reasonable to expect that some definite architectural expression might have been developed concurrently with progress in the technique of film production exhibition. Such unfortunately has not been the case. The impress of individuality still persists to frustrate the semblance of broad similarity which buildings of definite categories should reasonably possess.⁷⁰

For Philip Morton Shand, developments in cinema architecture were representative of wider social and technological change. Historically referenced schemes, he argued, were inconsistent with the expression of modernity that such buildings should represent:

*They are too augustly dignified, too epic and remotely antique for our mechanical age [...] If there is one type of building in which traditionalism – that is to say the classic orders and classic decorative motifs – is more out of place, it is the cinema.*⁷¹


It might be argued that whilst the decorative schemes of the Forum's foyer and its cafe shaped consumers' experience of the building, that of its auditorium was arguably secondary to its technological features. Ventilation, temperature control, comfort, screen size, projection and acoustics ultimately determined the experience of the building's primary function when the auditorium lights were turned down. This appears to be supported by the comparative lack of press interest in the building's decorative scheme compared with its construction and incorporated technologies. These were central to cinema architecture's typological development, and by enhancing the experience of audiences, helped reinforce the position of the cinematic medium as a primary vehicle for a globalising modernity.⁷²

Given Hollywood's prolific output, the social, moral and linguistic basis of such modernity was increasingly Americanised. Mark Glancy describes how America's expanding technological, commercial and cultural influence on Britain had been recognised since the 1860s and had been 'variously dreaded, accepted enthusiastically or seen as an economic necessity'.⁷³ Furthermore, the technological and commercial development of cinema during the 1920s coincided with a period of social change in Britain brought about by the extension of the franchise in 1918 and 1928, the consolidation of trade unionism and the development of a mass media and consumer culture. This raised concerns about cinema's corrupting potential upon standards of British life, particularly where it was perceived to undermine established moral values, social order, hierarchy and deference.⁷⁴

In the early 1930s Bath's civic leadership expressed a 'strong feeling for the necessity of dealing with the film question in a practical way'. Since the mid 1920s much of the city's population had considered itself 'fortunate in having a committee of magistrates who were very keen to see that no improper films [...] were shown'.⁷⁵ However, whilst it was observed that Bath was 'notorious for exercising much stricter control over films than most other places',⁷⁶ local censorship meant that films banned in the city were still screened in the neighbouring city of Bristol, and as result to even larger audiences.⁷⁷

Such local approaches can be seen as an attempt to manage cinema's impact upon social values in Bath and mitigate its inevitable liberalising effect. This might be seen as a parallel to the legal measures implemented in the city intended to manage change in the built environment and prevent the intrusion of architectural forms perceived as promoting an erroneous developmental trajectory. It is notable that in Bristol, where there was a more liberal approach to film censorship, there was a self conscious declaration of modernity in cinema design [figure 47].

The censorship controls seen in Bath might also be interpreted in the Forum's architecture and interior design. Internally exuberant yet culturally conservative, its decorative scheme was secondary to the experience of its primary function, the content of which was controlled by the local civic magistracy. In parallel its exterior, whilst incorporating expressions of modernity through its shop fronts, was shaped by what had become the city's legally enshrined architectural traditions, as indeed were the other developments examined in this chapter. However, unlike the Forum, the social change they reflected, such as new patterns of consumption, the use of new technologies in domestic management and the purchase of home furnishings, faced cultural and economic restraints. Conversely, cinema's potential for social change and the accessible and architecturally reflected vision of global modernity that it readily exhibited elsewhere was in opposition to the measured progress seen in the Forum's neoclassical exterior and the city it represented.



The Above Cinema —

A
Specimen of Modern Architecture

ERECTED BY
Messrs JOHN KNOX (Bristol) Ltd.

Also Contractors for
Odeon Cinema, Yeovil.
Odeon Cinema, Swiss Cottage, London, N.W.

JOHN KNOX (BRISTOL) **L^{TD}**

Head Office: CORONATION ROAD, BRISTOL, 3

Phone: 63076.

Figure 47: “A Specimen of Modern Architecture”. Press advertisement published on the opening of the Bristol Odeon, Western Daily Press, 16 July 1938, p.11 (© Local World Ltd. Image courtesy of British Library Board).

Chapter 5

National Reconstruction and Bath's Interwar Council Housing.

pleasing in appearance and strictly utilitarian in character.

Alfred Wills, Alderman of Bath, 1933.¹

Between 1919 and 1939 Britain experienced a period of sustained urban development. In England and Wales the total urban area increased by almost fifty percent from 2.2 million acres to 3.2 million acres, the vast majority of development involving the construction of 4.2 million new houses. Of these, 1.2 million were constructed by local authorities and 3 million by private developers.² In Bath this was reflected in the construction of 4242 new houses, of which 2438 were built by private developers and 1804 by the city council, that increased the city's overall size by almost a third.³

As representations of modernity and change, both private and municipal housing introduced new building typologies and planning forms and articulations and distributions of social class into the built environment. The construction of municipal housing was also indicative of a new relationship between the working classes and the state, in which the latter adopted a supervisory role over the health of the former as a prerequisite of national reconstruction.

The construction of Bath's interwar council housing was informed by a series of Parliamentary Acts that divided development into two periods. The first spanned from the end of the Great War until 1933 and occurred under the Housing Acts of 1919, 1923 and 1924. During this period housing estates were constructed on the city's southern and western rural fringes, at Englishcombe Park under the design and supervision of Alfred J. Taylor, and at Southdown, Rudmore Park and Odd Down under city engineer Frank P. Sissons. Their planning schemes and fresh Bath stone construction formed salient features in the city's landscape setting before subsequent adjacent development [figures 48 and 49].

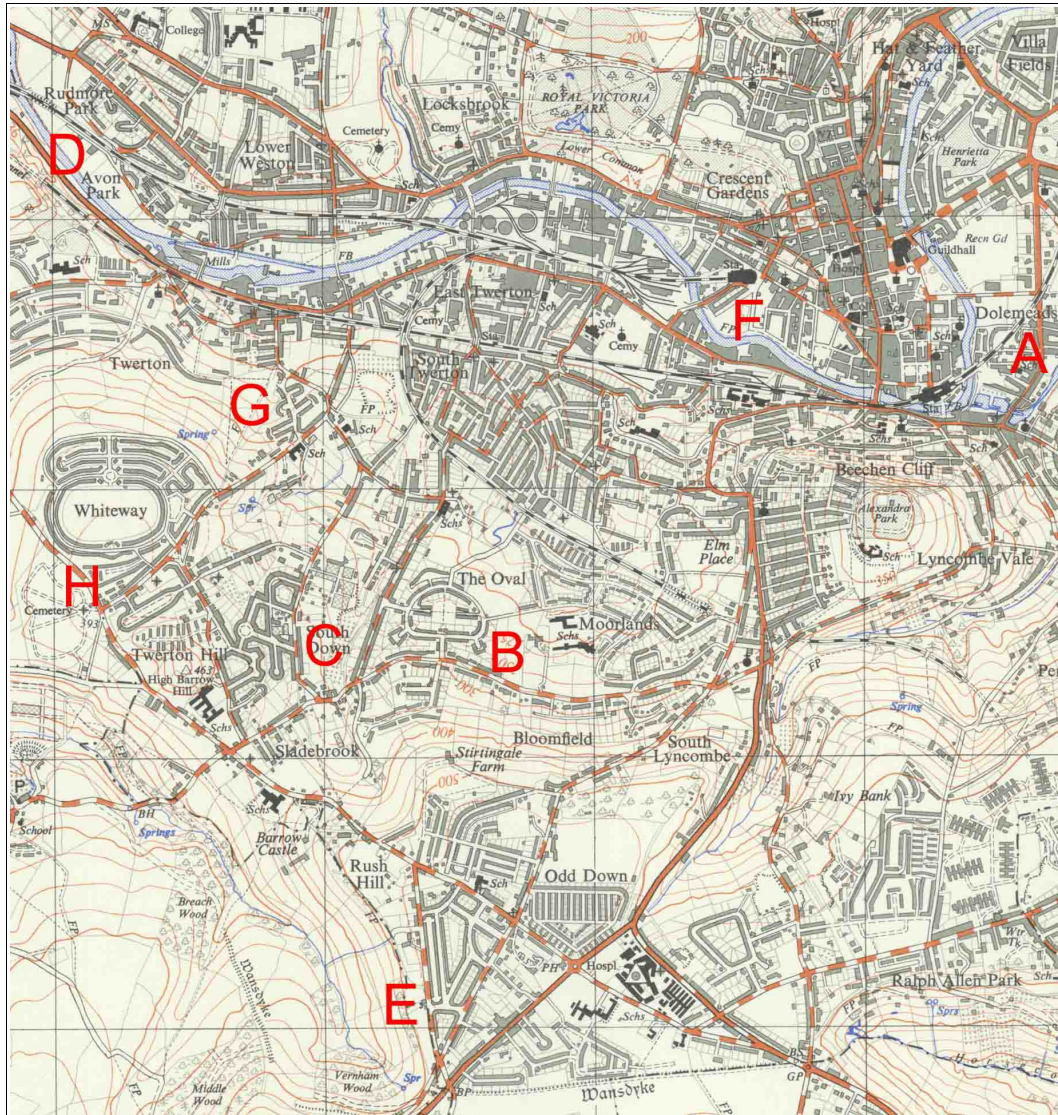


Figure 48: Map indicating locations of interwar council housing estates in Bath in order of development; (A) the Dolemeads; (B) Englishcombe Park/The Oval; (C) Southdown; (D) Rudmore Park and Avon Park; (E) Odd Down; (F) the Kingsmead Flats; (G) Shophouse Road/Innox Park; (H) Whiteway and Roundhill Park (1:25,000 Ordnance Survey Map 1958, Sheet ST76 with adaptations. Not all locations present on similar scale 1930s Sheet)



Figure 49: The Southdown estate (location C in figure 48) amid undeveloped semi-rural setting. Photograph 1928 (Britain from Above).

Housing construction in the second period was informed by the 1930 Housing Act aimed at slum clearance and accompanied in 1933 by a withdrawal of government subsidies for all but this purpose.⁴ The most notable development in this decade was the construction of three blocks of flats in 1932 built to the south of the city centre next to the River Avon under the 1925 Bath Act without government subsidy.⁵ After 1933 development occurred on a smaller scale with the exception of the Innox Park/Shophouse estate at Twerton in 1935. In 1938 estates were commenced at Roundhill Park and Whiteway to the south west of the city in its largest interwar municipal development and where construction was interrupted by the outbreak of war.⁶

The provision of working class housing was the central challenge of national reconstruction after the First World War. In his pre-election speech made in Wolverhampton on 23rd November 1918, Lloyd George identified the national task to make 'Britain a fit country for heroes to live in'.⁷ Behind the rhetoric lay the political realities of Britain's housing problem.

It is estimated that in 1914, ninety per cent of national housing stock was privately

rented, ten per cent was owner occupied with less than one per cent owned by local authorities.⁸ Wartime shortages and lack of maintenance had worsened the pre-war dilapidation of much working class housing while rents had increased prompting rent strikes and social and industrial unrest.⁹ This problem became compounded by the prospect of large numbers of disaffected servicemen returning from the war.¹⁰ In 1919 the Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board stated that despite its vast cost, the large scale construction of new housing 'was an insurance against Bolshevism and Revolution'.¹¹ Although Bath had profited from the war through a increase in visitor numbers, the poor housing conditions that it was felt were faced by many working class families in the city meant that such concerns remained relevant and in 1923 it was observed that:

*Unless something was done to improve the housing conditions in Bath, before many years there would be Communist hymnbooks in use in their schools.*¹²

Pre-war political acknowledgement of the living conditions of Britain's urban working classes had by 1916 developed into the recognition that a state led response to the problem would be a post war imperative. In 1917 the government commissioned a committee chaired by the Liberal MP Sir John Tudor Walters to 'consider questions of building construction and report on methods of securing "economy and dispatch" in the provision of working class housing'.¹³ The ensuing Tudor Walters report was published in 1918 and set building standards and specifications that would inform both social and private housing during the interwar period. It also underpinned the 1919 Housing Act that required local authorities to assess and produce plans to meet housing needs within three months.¹⁴

Provision would take the form of a new building type known as the 'standard cottage', its utilitarian design determined by the imperative to expedite construction, financial constraints and material shortages. It would be built predominantly as semi detached, two or three bedroom, and parlour or non-parlour variants with internal sanitation at a density of twelve per acre on purpose built estates with planning features such as cul-de-sacs, grass verges, planted trees, privet hedges and green spaces. These features stemmed from influences

rooted in the reaction to nineteenth century industrial urbanism that were expressed in industrial model villages such as New Earswick constructed in 1902, garden cities such as Letchworth and garden suburbs such as Hampstead's built in 1906.¹⁵

Like their precursors, interwar council estates represented a significant departure from the terraced working class housing and gridiron cityscapes of Victorian Britain that were products of former Parliamentary Acts. Of these, the 1875 Labourer's Dwellings Improvement Act and Public Health Act were to have a significant impact on the fabric and form of British cities by giving councils the authority to demolish slum areas but obliging them to replace them with new dwellings. These would be constructed under byelaws that regulated the dimensions and sizes of streets and pavements and the 'structure of walls, foundations, roofs and chimneys of new buildings, for securing stability and the prevention of fire and for purposes of health'.¹⁶ Yet by the turn of the century such housing was seen as socially and technologically outdated.

In Bath the 1875 Acts led to the speculative construction of terraced housing in Twerton, Larkhall and Fairfield and by the turn of the century the council had developed plans to build municipal dwellings at the Dolemeads and at Lampard's Buildings.¹⁷ The Dolemeads was constructed as part of a phased development of red brick houses on ground raised beyond the flood level of the nearby river Avon to replace the area's former slum dwellings.¹⁸ The first houses were officially opened by the Dowager Lady Tweedmouth in June 1901.¹⁹ A contemporary photograph depicts them regaled in bunting for the occasion, evidencing the extent of civic pride in the event [figure 50]. Yet the development was criticised by *The British Architect*. In view of the innovations occurring elsewhere it stated it could 'not discover in either plan or elevation any advance on former methods' and that 'such tawdry elements of festivity are poor compensations for the reality of architectural quality'.²⁰



*Figure 50: The opening ceremony of the Dolemeads development.
Photograph 1901(Bath Central Library/Bath in Time).*

A notable feature of such innovations was the organised and balanced variation of architecture and planning to express individuality without disunity.²¹ Yet for Britains interwar council estates, such features formed a paradox in relation to the standardised building types they contained and the sociopolitical prerequisites of national reconstruction. This was anticipated by the architect Stanley Adshead, who in 1916 wrote that:

In advocating the standardisation of the cottage, one is reminded that a principle is being propounded which at first sight will appear to many to be decidedly reactionary, and this in view of the accepted interpretation of the teachings of the Ruskin and Morris schools. These schools which stand for the consecration of the individual and of individual labour, would seem to be utterly opposed to any system of standardisation, holding the belief as they do, that there is no value in things made by machines.²²

However, as Paul Jones observes, Ruskinism 'harbours a determinism at its core, with the sense that architectural forms could actually shape behaviour and

morality'.²³ This notion can be clearly discerned in Adshead's advocacy of standardisation:

*It will not be the home of an individual, of an anarchist; but the home of a member of a certain class of the community. The standard cottage is an essential appendage of a highly organised social system and without it we cannot have that which lies at the root of national efficiency, organisation and economy.*²⁴

This is significant in that it can be seen as analogous with the moral authority and social functionalism symbolised by Bath's Georgian architecture. It also invites a military analogy in terms of the desirability of social uniformity and hierarchical organisation that after the war and throughout the interwar period would find expression in the application of military health classifications to the working classes.²⁵

This was explicit in the cover illustration of *The Home I Want*, an account of municipal housing development in the immediate post war period written in 1919 by Richard Reiss, chairman of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association [figure 51]. It provided a clear message that the poor housing that had significantly undermined the health of working class recruits in the Boer War and the Great War not only stood to undermine the industrial output required for national reconstruction but was also a threat to national and imperial security.²⁶

As part of its obligations under the 1919 Housing Act, Bath's council had by 1921 erected twelve double fronted semi-detached 'standard cottages' in the Dolemeads. In a juxtaposition redolent of the cover illustration of *The Home I Want*, the houses designed by Alfred J. Taylor contrasted sharply with those of the development's earlier phases.²⁷ Constructed at an approximate density of twelve per acre they conformed to modern national building specifications whilst the use of Bath stone looked to local material traditions. The gabled elevations and porches and arched doorways seen on four of the houses recall their model village progenitors yet contrast with the greater utilitarianism seen on subsequent peripheral estates [figures 52 and 53].

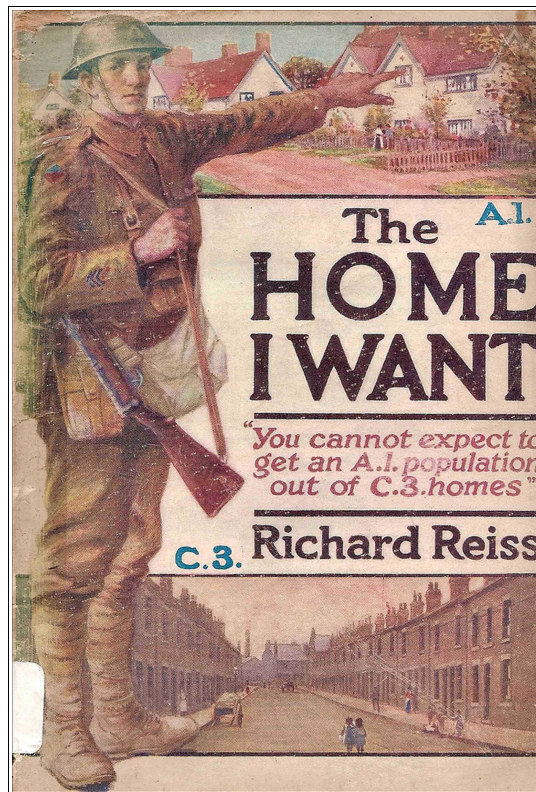


Figure 51: The Home I Want by Richard Reiss, 1919. Cover illustration indicating the application of military health classification to the civilian population and juxtaposing anonymous Victorian Terraces with housing at New Earswick (Hodder and Stoughton).



Figure 52: Material, architectural and socio-political contrasts seen at Broadway in the Dolemeads. Photograph 2011 (Robin Pakes).



Figure 53: Gabled elevations and porches and arched doorways featured in Bath's first interwar municipal housing development.

Photograph 2011 (Robin Pakes).

Bath's first interwar council estate was located on the city's upper southern slopes at Englishcombe Fields and contained provision for 237 standard cottages of 4 variant types with the first phase of 38 at a cost of £939 per house, contracted to be completed in February 1921.²⁸ The development in which the first 113 cottages were constructed under the 1919 Housing Act and the remainder under the subsidy provisions of the 1923 Housing Act, was notable for its eponymous oval plan [figures 54, 55 and 56].²⁹

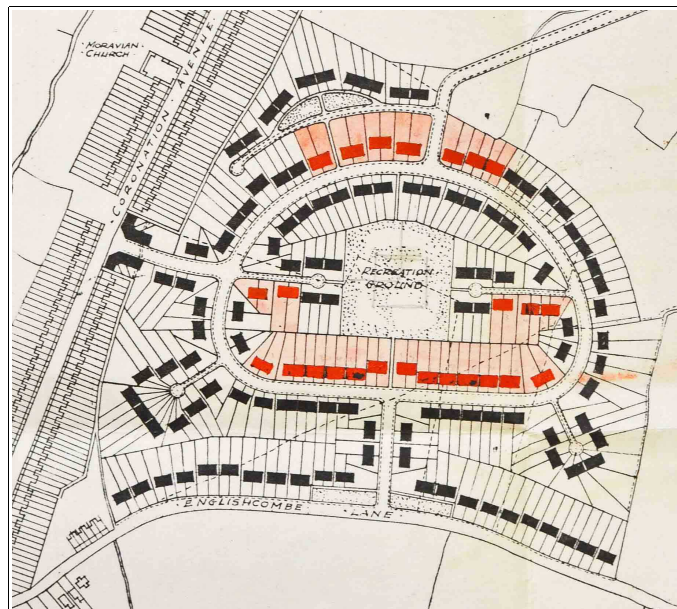


Figure 54: The Englishcombe Park estate by Alfred J. Taylor. Plan drawing indicating central recreation ground, oval plan and cul de sacs along with contrast with adjacent early Edwardian ribbon development (Bath Record Office).



Figure 55: Elevation and plan drawings of Type B North Aspect Houses for the Englishcombe Park estate by Alfred J. Taylor, 1920 (Bath Record Office).



Figure 56: The Oval at the Englishcombe Park estate. Postcard c.1930 (author's collection).

Although it included garden city planning features such as cul de sacs and arboreal street names, and met with approval on a visit by the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association in 1926,³⁰ the estate did not match the qualitative standards that might be perceived inherent of its guiding principles.

Complaints were made by the tenants' association about the disrepair and inadequate width of the roads and pathways leading to calls that the estate's grass verges (that became muddy and slippery in wet weather) be removed.³¹ In addition, the green space at the estate's centre that was intended to be a recreation ground became overgrown due to a failure to plan adequately for its upkeep and paths were not laid across it until 1928.³²

The design and build quality of the estate's houses was also a cause of dissatisfaction. The sloping site meant that a number were built with steps leading to their doors, although railings were not fitted until 1924 after complaints and a claim for medical expenses resulting from the injuries sustained by a child falling.³³ Between 1923 and 1925 reports of leaking roofs and defective floors, chimneys and ceilings were accompanied by repeated requests for reductions in rent.³⁴ These issues may have underpinned the observation made by *The Bath Chronicle* in 1924 that an 'artistic gardening' competition proposed for the estate by the Housing Committee really represented 'an inducement of prizes' to promote the notion of its planning ideals and quality among its residents.³⁵

Furthermore, high construction costs meant that the 'supply of electric current' contemplated during its planning phase in 1920 was not installed and the estate's houses were fitted with gas for lighting, heating and cooking.³⁶ Electricity for lighting would be a standard feature in subsequent municipal developments and would be accompanied by mains electricity at the end of the interwar period, however tenders for electrical installation in houses at Englishcombe where tenants had not already paid for installation themselves were not sought until 1938.³⁷ An apparent lack of tenants' complaints about the quality of houses on subsequent estates might indicate the availability of superior materials, a developing expertise in the production of specifications for this building typology and an increased familiarity with associated construction methods among builders.

Construction costs of Bath's council housing were also higher than elsewhere. The cheapest tenders for the first new houses built at the Dolemeads in 1919 had amounted to more than two thousand pounds a pair. At a council meeting it was argued that these 'houses had been built under the most uneconomical conditions', the economies of scale that would have been available for a larger scheme having been ignored. A tender of £7,796 for the remaining ten houses in the scheme invited further criticism and a number of council members 'objected to building houses at £800 for the working classes in the Dolemeads'. Yet it appears that the council was resigned to its obligations, one of its leaders stating in response that 'the Government say they must go up'.³⁸

The high costs also delayed construction, with Bath lagging behind other towns and cities as indicated by its absence from Reiss' comprehensive national listing of municipal schemes that included those in the nearby Bradford on Avon and Radstock.³⁹ In response to concerns expressed by the Divisional Commissioner about the delay and inadequacy of the Bath Housing Scheme to meet district requirements when Swindon was planning to construct 1000 dwellings and Cheltenham 500, the council stated that the city had a 'declining population'. Applications for the new housing were said to be unforthcoming, even though 'advertisements had been inserted in local papers [...] they had only 44 applicants on the register'.⁴⁰

The perceived reluctance to move to Bath's new council houses might be explained by Englishcombe Park's peripheral location as well the additional costs of furnishing and transport on top of rent prices that reflected high construction costs. In addition it represents a possible reflection of wider economic developments that according to Alison Ravetz included a fall in wages after the immediate post-war boom had ended, so reinforcing the situation in which council rents were often beyond the reach of most working-class households.⁴¹ However, by 1922 demand outstripped supply with two hundred applicants registered for fifty houses.⁴² By 1930 there were 450 applicants on the register, the level of demand underpinning the construction of the 360 dwelling estate at Odd Down where the subsidy extensions provided by the 1924 Act allowed lower rental costs as it had at the Southdown estate in 1928.⁴³

The costs and delay of construction was in no small part a result of the council's insistence on Bath Stone for the exterior elevations in its municipal schemes and refusal to countenance approaches made by contractors such as Atholl Steel Houses Ltd and the Dry Shell Construction Company.⁴⁴ At a council meeting in April 1920 a suggestion by a member of the 'women's section of the Bath Labour Party' that the two issues could be addressed by the use of non traditional materials (as seen in Southampton where concrete houses had been built for £400) was dismissed in view of the public 'outcry' that it was claimed would ensue if concrete houses were built 'when there was native stone at our doors'.⁴⁵

It is worth noting that the cost of council house construction had been arguably reduced by the development of stone cutting machinery by the Corsham Bath Stone Company in 1918. This could cut a standard block size of 2 feet 3 inches in length by 6½ inches in height by 4½ inches in thickness. These agreed dimensions were informed by the requirements to correspond well with internal brick construction and to be 'handled and fixed by one man'. The company's managing director noted that whilst mechanized sawing did not represent a technological innovation, it had 'never been seriously applied to Bath stone' due to the nature of its trade and supply. In a seeming allusion to vested commercial interest (particularly given the council's former purchasing decision at the Dolemeads) it was claimed that the technology would enable the local material to take its 'proper place as facing stone' in the 'foreshadowed' new council houses.⁴⁶

The delay however, was not confined to Bath. In August 1919 *The Times* described the 'slow progress' of municipal schemes throughout Britain. Local authorities, it was claimed, were 'Manacled with Red Tape' due to the methods of the Government Departments and shortages of labour and materials.⁴⁷ In addition the increased price of construction materials such as roofing tiles that by 1920 had risen by 275% from their pre-war price compounded the challenge faced by government and local authorities.⁴⁸

The council's insistence on Bath Stone would bring it into disagreement with the government in 1935 following a ministerial request that brick was used to reduce the cost and expedite the construction of a proposed development of 128 houses at

Shophouse Road in Twerton for families displaced by slum clearance. The council refused to accede and argued that the use of Bath stone was based on a requirement for the houses to conform to the specification of those 'already erected in the city and approved by the ministry'.⁴⁹ Yet earlier council developments had shown that compromise was obligatory for other materials.

The use of imported French red roof tiles at Englishcombe Park and the Southdown estate jarred with the landscape and was felt to undermine the principle of aesthetic control.⁵⁰ In June 1930 the Old Bath Preservation Society wrote to the council calling for 'Dun coloured tiles' to be used on future developments,⁵¹ although the red tiles remained controversial. In 1933, Professor Charles H. Reilly wrote to *The Times* suggesting that the tiles represented failure by the council to both develop a town planning scheme and enact the same legal powers of aesthetic control on its own buildings as those imposed on private developers. Reilly accused the council of 'short-sightedness' given that the city's popularity depended 'on the maintenance of its urban beauty and rural surroundings' suggesting that a failure to implement a planning scheme was due to an unwillingness to meet the expense and the 'apprehensions of speculative builders' who were also council members.⁵²

In the council's defence the Mayor argued that in contrast to Reilly's 'foolish and false statement', the use of the tiles at Englishcombe had been the result of specification and supply imposed by officials appointed under The Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919 over which the council, despite its protests, had no control. Those at Southdown were the result, it was claimed, of 'limits of cost imposed by government conditions'.⁵³

The material, financial, aesthetic and governmental constraints faced by the council were arguably compounded by the wider perception of the city's image. Given the range of planned and implemented civic improvements and the legislative emphasis on the city's aesthetic values, it would have been readily perceived that Bath was as isolated from the imperatives of national reconstruction as it had been from the emergencies of war. Furthermore the city was not seen to have a significant history or problem of overcrowding. In 1919

the number of people living in overcrowded tenements in the city was almost unchanged from the 4.1 per cent reported by the Medical Officer of Health in 1891, and contrasted with a national figure of 11.2. per cent.⁵⁴

In 1925 the Minister of Health Neville Chamberlain visited Bath, and having toured the Dolemeads and Englishcombe Park was reported to have observed 'that in comparison to other places there were no slums here'.⁵⁵ This view was instrumental in the government's unwillingness to adequately subsidise the city's ongoing housing program during the 1930s and contributed to a financial deficit.⁵⁶ For what was seen as the city's most progressive municipal development during this period there was no state grant whatsoever.

The Kingsmead Flats were designed by Frank P. Sissons and constructed under the provisions of the 1925 Bath Act to provide accommodation in advance for families displaced by the first phase of the city's slum clearance programme. Their opening on 11th October 1932 was heralded as 'A Landmark in Bath's Civic Progress' that enabled the council to promote itself as socially progressive in its provision to the least fortunate sections of the community. The occasion was marked by the unveiling of a commemorative tablet by the Mayor and the publication of an illustrated souvenir booklet.⁵⁷ In its foreword, Alderman Alfred Wills stated that:

*It would be somewhat difficult to find a body of people to-day who would deny that the community has a special duty towards a certain section of the population, more particularly, the slum dwellers. It has not always been so – the public conscience (in Bath) in relation to the slum areas is largely due to the efforts of men who have given great thought and unstinted effort, towards educating the general public, in the last 40 years.*⁵⁸

Built on ground raised above the flood level of the nearby River Avon at a cost of £64,000, the development consisted of three identical four storey blocks that were Bath's first steel framed structures. The eighty-eight one, two and three bedroom flats contained 'complete domestic accommodation' and were 'fitted with electric light [and gas] installed for heating and cooking' and were linked by a common

balcony arranged around a quadrangle open to the river. Features such as trees and 'lock ups for perambulators' produced a scheme described as 'pleasing in appearance and strictly utilitarian in character' [figures 57 to 61].⁵⁹



Figure 57: "'The New' rising from 'The Ashes of the Past'". The steel frame of the Kingsmead Flats' steel frame under construction. Photograph featured in A.W Wills, The Kingsmead Flats, 1932 (City of Bath Corporation).



Figure 58: The rear of the north and west Kingmead blocks indicating balconies and entrances. Photograph featured in A.W Wills, The Kingsmead Flats, 1932 (City of Bath Corporation).

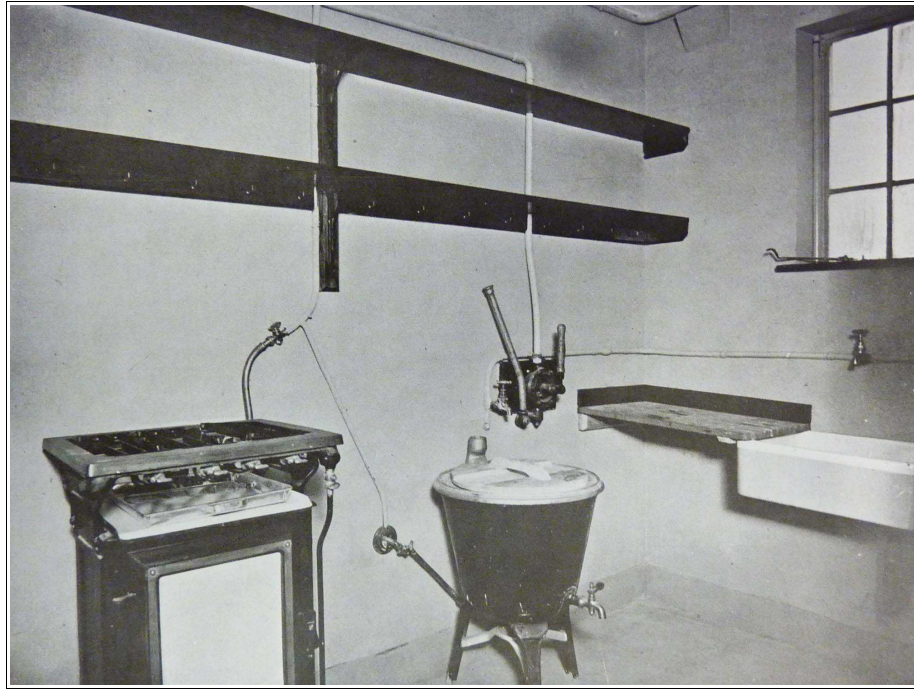


Figure 59: "Complete domestic accommodation". Interior view featuring gas stove and wash boiler. Photograph featured in A.W Wills, The Kingsmead Flats, 1932 (City of Bath Corporation).

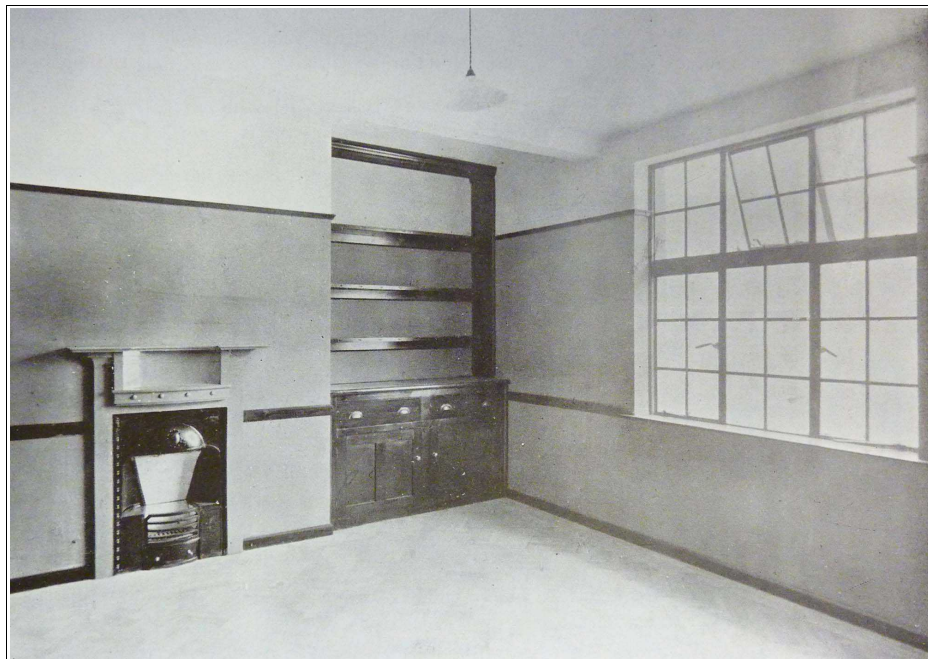


Figure 60: Interior view featuring internal fixtures and fittings. Photograph featured in A.W Wills, The Kingsmead Flats, 1932 (City of Bath Corporation).

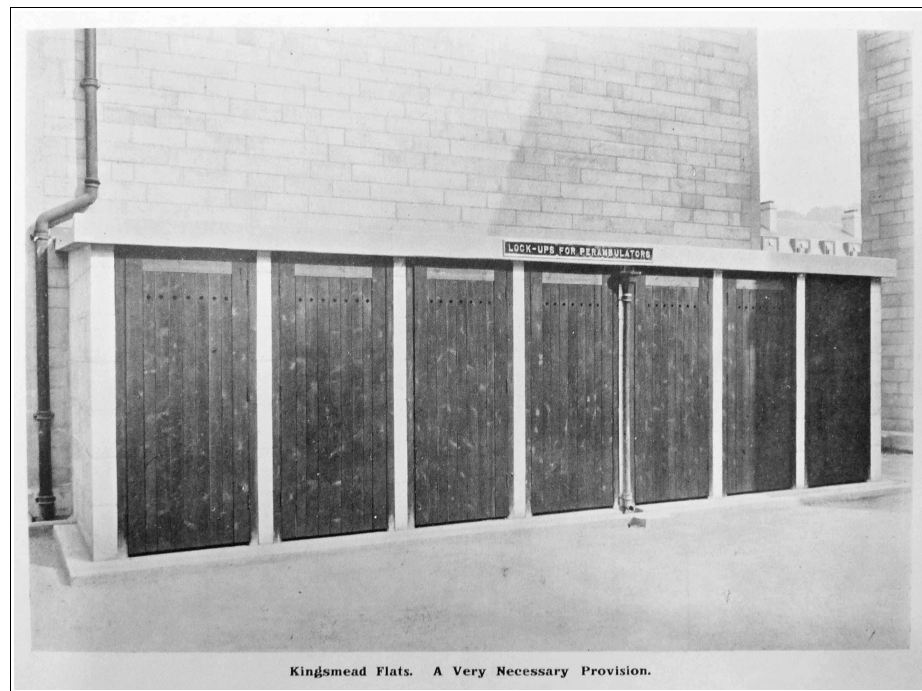


Figure 61: “A Very Necessary Provision”. Perambulator storage at the Kingsmead flats Photograph featured in A.W Wills, The Kingsmead Flats, 1932 (City of Bath Corporation).

The new articulation and distribution of social class that council housing introduced into the built environment also served to delineate tenants according to the provisions of consecutive housing acts. This mirrored a wider trend of social filtering that was an accepted feature of the 1919 Housing Act whereby municipal housing would be initially allocated to an 'artisan elite'.⁶⁰ This would promote an upward mobility of housing standards across the working classes that was reflected in the local observation that:

*the 50 houses now building at Englishcombe will be occupied by fifty people who will leave inferior houses: that those inferior houses, in turn, will be occupied by people who live in still more inferior houses and that process will be repeated until the slums are emptied.*⁶¹

The provisions of the 1924 Housing Act underpinned the construction of the 148 houses at the Southdown estate and enabled a reduction in rents to address the housing shortage affecting lower paid workers and larger families.⁶² However at the planning stages of the 360 dwelling Odd Down estate there was an uncertainty

as to whether the scheme should be implemented under the 1924 or 1930 Act or as a combination of the two due to the variations in the financial subsidy they provided.⁶³ This also prompted the council's acquisition of land adjacent to Shophouse Road to enable the construction of houses for those displaced by slum clearance, a measure that the council's Housing Committee records noted avoided 'the difficulties of having two classes of tenants on one estate'.⁶⁴

Although it is not stated what such difficulties were, it might be seen as a precursor to the housing allocation policies of the post war period that at a national level served to further delineate council tenants according to socio-economic status with interwar housing allocated to the poorest.⁶⁵ The complex issues surrounding the decline and stigmatisation of interwar council estates in the second half of the twentieth century are beyond the scope of this study,⁶⁶ however they appear to have been anticipated in part, by one contemporary local observer:

*The segregation of working class families in special areas is both undesirable and antisocial [...] There is a danger in getting into one area, representatives of a rate aided class.*⁶⁷

Bath's interwar council housing represented a significant and popular modern alternative to the city's nineteenth and early twentieth century speculative and municipal working class housing stock. Constructed to improving standards on comparatively spacious estates in what were considered to be healthy locations and local beauty spots,⁶⁸ the houses (or flats in the case of the Kingsmead development) contained internal plumbing, sanitation and fixed baths, and with the exception of the initial developments, electric lighting and mains supply.

Although initially required as part of national reconstruction, its ongoing development is indicative of an impetus to civic improvement that extended beyond the beautification of areas frequented by visitors to the city. The estates' presence in the landscape setting, although seen as controversial by some, provided a visual indication of the council's exercised responsibility. Similarly the construction of the Kingsmead flats was promoted as an indication of the

council's progressive character in relation to the community.

The insistence on Bath stone evidences a consciousness that development of any kind might be subject to an increased level of scrutiny determined by the responsibilities imposed by the city's perceived aesthetic value and significance. Its use provided a visual coherence between city and suburb that was important given the spatial redistribution of a decreasing city population. As such it be seen to imply, although not evidence, a coherence between the classes that reflected the values of social organisation that were essential to national reconstruction and symbolically reflected in Bath's Georgian architecture.

Conclusion

Bath Between the Wars.

Against the antique background of modern Bath, people of the twentieth century lead a modern life that would have amazed the dandy of the eighteenth century.

Donald Taylor, *An Interlude in Bath*, 1938.¹

As part of a wider reaction to Victorian urbanism and the shift in interpretations of national identity resulting from the experience of the Great War, Georgian and Roman Bath provided a meaningful inspiration for a new understanding of British modernity and nationhood. The city's architecture and planning was understood as a nationally relevant expression of the values of social organisation and unity and represented an historic reference point in Britain's imperial mission. These developments boosted Bath's position as a tourist and commercial centre and consolidated its civic identity. This created a desire to improve the city's built environment and manage its developmental trajectory, resulting in new planning legislation that established the principle of local aesthetic control over the design and construction of new buildings.

Bath's Georgian architecture could be understood as consistent with the rationalist intellectual precedents from which modern electrical and petrochemical technologies had developed and positioned the city as a historic reference point in national expressions of modernity and managed progress. This contrasted with the architectural experimentation seen in Europe, Scandinavia, and as the period progressed, elsewhere in Britain. In Bath, this was singularly represented by Kilowatt House whilst new buildings in the city that conformed to its legally defined traditions were seen by some as anachronistic in view of the period's wider technological identity.

New transport technologies promoted optimism and aspiration yet underpinned anxieties about the changes they might bring. The aeroplane was at the forefront of modernity's ameliorative promise yet provided the seemingly unstoppable

vector for unprecedented levels of destruction, although interwar Bath remained largely aloof to such developments. The novelty of the 1932 air pageant was countered by an insufficiently 'air minded' local population,² and protests about British bombardments in India and Iraq were outweighed by an apparent apathy towards civil defence measures prompted by an impending European conflict. Ultimately Bath's own aspiration to join the aviation age with the construction of an aerodrome to link the city to an imperial aviation network was undermined by the motor car.

With possibly the nation's highest rate of car ownership and the city's promotion as a 'motoring centre',³ Bath was the scene of significant congestion. In a continuation of the physical and perceptual transitions instigated in street spaces by the electric tram, the motor car brought new dangers and new features to the city's streets, producing a tension between modern traffic and historic fabric. This was perceived by Bath's preservationists to parallel the car's physical and socioeconomic incursion into the countryside and which threatened to bring an invasive commercialism to the city that would strike at its core cultural values.

The increase in motor traffic meant that it would become a central feature in the city improvement plans intended to boost the local economy and consolidate Bath's civic and cultural identity. Atkinson's proposal sought to promote Bath as a spa whilst reflecting its emerging importance as a symbol of national identity, yet it remained unrealised due to the city's financial obligations towards national reconstruction. The 1925 riverside boulevard scheme saw a shift from a cultural and balneal emphasis towards social and commercial objectives. Although unrealised, it was significant in that it formed part of the 1925 Bath Act that enabled street improvements and consolidated notions of Bath's architectural traditions through the legislative principle of aesthetic control.

This was firmly established by the time of the 1935 scheme that sought to realign the city centre's economy by rationalising its traffic problems. Central to the scheme was the controversial demolition of swathes of historic fabric to expose selected historic buildings as cultural reference points. This could be seen in parallel to the contemporary despotic remodelling of Rome that was anathema to

the historic basis of British urban development. The scheme was ultimately precluded by concerns over cost with the result that the required demolition, that would have been underway at the start of World War 2, was not added to by aerial bombardment in the spring of 1942.

In 1933, demolition was a major feature of the lower city centre where speculative and municipal development of commercial premises reflected civic dynamism and a sense of transformation. New buildings proudly expressed Bath's perceived architectural traditions whilst their modern interiors were the experiential locus for new forms of consumption and entertainment reflecting wider social change.

Where consumption related to suburban expansion, the rate and extent of change was regulated by economic factors and social and cultural values based on restraint and moderation. In contrast, the ready economic accessibility of cinema entertainment promoted forms of social change seen to derive from an alternative and exogenous cultural vision. Local censorship represented an attempt to manage and mitigate cinema's socially destabilising influence in the city. This represented a parallel to the local legislation that had been passed to manage urban change, prevent undesirable development and promote a desired set of architectural and cultural values.

Social organisation was an objective in the development of Bath's interwar council housing. Like the interwar council estates throughout Britain, those constructed around Bath's periphery formed the central feature of national reconstruction and provided a new articulation and spatial distribution of social class in the built environment. The new housing represented a significant and popular improvement on the slums and the privately rented and municipal terraces that had previously formed the city's working class housing stock. Bath's council was keen to promote itself as socially progressive in terms of housing provision, particularly in relation to slum clearance given the lack of governmental recognition of this area of its activities.

The new housing estates had a significant impact on Bath's landscape setting and the council was mindful of the responsibilities imposed by historic importance in

the face of material and financial constraints. The use of local stone for its council houses can be seen not only as a means to promote visual coherence between city and suburb and but also to imply the class unity essential to the organised social system that was symbolised by the city's Georgian architecture.

Despite its historic image, interwar Bath demonstrated a civic dynamism and impetus towards urban and social improvement. The expression of modernity was managed through aesthetic controls that sought to harmonise it with what were understood as the city's architectural traditions. As a result, the developments of the period have merged into the city's material palette and dominant stylistic scheme or have been absorbed into subsequent suburban development. As such their significance in the city's twentieth century development, and the experience of change they represented for those who visited or lived in Bath between the wars, has been largely overlooked.

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